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# **Heritage and National Identity in Post-Socialist Albania**

**By**

**David Sebastian Fermor**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the  
Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**School of Science and the Environment**

**November 2018**

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my mother, Wendy Fermor and my wonderful partner, Jenny Warburton for their unfailing support and encouragement and for bringing me cups of tea when I needed them most.

I would also like to thank my supervisors Professor Craig Young and Doctor Tim Edensor for their encouragement, guidance and sage advice.

And I would like to thank all those many people who were welcoming, helpful and generous with their time when I was carrying out fieldwork in Albania, especially Elton Caushi, Edi Lamce, Sadi Petrela, Fioralba Duma, Kosta Nace, Kristaq Kullufe and the staff at CESVI in Permet.

## **Abstract**

In this thesis I critically evaluate the concept of the “democratisation of memory” (Atkinson 2008) and to analyse the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity through an analysis of changing practices of the (re)construction and consumption of three selected “myths” of Albanian national identity at heritage sites and museums. The three selected myths are; the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity, which is the origin myth of the Albanian nation; the myth of the Albanian national hero Skanderbeg; and myth and memory of the Stalinist dictator Enver Hoxha and of state-socialism. I will argue throughout this thesis that the particular “democratisation of memory” described by Atkinson (2008) is just one type or pattern of that phenomenon, and that different types or patterns of the “democratisation of memory” can occur in different contexts and in relation to different narratives, myths and memories. I will also argue that the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity observed and analysed in Albania is quite different to that which Atkinson’s (2008) writings suggest. While Atkinson (2008) dwells on the way in which the “democratisation of memory” can allow “traditional” and “official” narratives to be challenged and undermined my research reveals that, in the context of post-socialist Albania, some “traditional” and “official” narratives of Albanian national identity – the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the myth of Skanderbeg - have actually been bolstered by the “democratisation of memory” as they are represented and consumed in more ways and by more individuals than before and are thereby more deeply embedded in everyday life. At the same time, though, my research shows that negative “official” post-socialist era representations of state-socialism *have* been challenged and undermined through the “democratisation of memory”. I therefor offer an expanded notion of the “democratisation of memory” based upon the post-socialist and Albanian contexts.

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## **1.0. Introduction.**

In this thesis I aim to critically evaluate the concept of the “democratisation of memory” as proposed by Atkinson (2008) and to analyse the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity. This is done through an analysis of changing practices of the (re)construction and consumption of three selected “myths” of Albanian national identity at heritage sites and museums in the state-socialist and post-socialist periods. The term “democratisation of memory” was first coined by Atkinson (2008). It attempts to develop a concept which accounts for recent trends and changes in the nature of the production and reproduction of memory and how this relates to the socio-cultural construction of identities in the twenty-first century. It posits a key change in the form of a shift from the production of “a singular uncontested history” by “experts who knew what was notable and important about our past” (Atkinson, 2008: 382) to the “emergence of plural voices that complicate, expand upon, dispute or undermine traditional “official” narratives of history”.

This thesis aims to shed light upon the process of the democratisation of memory as it has occurred in the context of post-socialist era Albania. Atkinson’s (2008) concept, the “democratisation of memory” (which is expanded upon and critically reviewed in Chapter 2: Literature Review), was selected as the core theoretical focus of this thesis due to the nature of post-socialist era change in Albania and in the post-socialist states of CEE more broadly. Under Albania’s state-socialist regime the (re)production of memory and myth was under the control of a small elite group at the apex of a highly centralised state. This was an extreme example of the (re)production of – to paraphrase Atkinson (2008: 382) - a “singular uncontested history” by a ruling elite. The transition from, or transformation of, this highly centralised “top-down” production of memory and myth is an important facet of post-socialist change and an area requiring academic scrutiny. At the same time Albania provides an interesting context in which to explore, challenge and develop further Atkinson’s (2008) ideas.

Atkinson’s (2008) description of the “democratisation of memory” is based upon observations of trends and processes which have occurred in the UK. Little research on the “democratisation of memory” in other contexts has been carried out. There is a dearth of research into the democratisation of memory in the context of the post-socialist countries of

Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), despite the fact that these countries would appear to present particularly appropriate context for the study of the process. The processes of democratisation, marketization and liberalisation, and the opening up to global flows of ideas – or in short the transition to “Western” norms which was once expected to occur in the post-socialist countries of CEE – might be expected to bring forth the same kind of “democratisation of memory” as has occurred in “the West”. But, as Verdery (1996) observes, a straightforward “transition” to “Western” norms has not occurred in any of the post-socialist countries of CEE. Albania provides an arena in which to observe and study the democratisation of memory in a post-socialist context. It was selected for three reasons. Firstly, because the transition from state-socialism was a particularly dramatic and sudden one. Secondly, because the relatively small size of the country makes a comprehensive survey of heritage tourism sites and other important “places of memory” an achievable goal. And thirdly because it is a country about which I have long had a deep curiosity and in which I enjoy travelling and carrying out research.

The study of the “democratisation of memory” in post-socialist era Albania provides a valuable opportunity to discover how – indeed if – the “democratisation of memory” occurs in a context other than the UK or “the West”. In turn, this allows for exploration of how this study of the phenomenon in the post-socialist Albanian context ‘talks back’ to theories of memory and national identity which have largely been developed based on the experience of ‘the West’. It underpins the contribution of this thesis to broader literatures on memory and national identity. The aims and objectives of my thesis are as follows;

My research aims;

- 1) To critically evaluate the concept of the “democratisation of memory” in the post-socialist context.
- 2) To analyse the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity in the context of post-socialist Albania;
- 3) To explore the “democratisation of memory” by analysing changing practices of the (re)construction and consumption of three selected “myths” of Albanian national identity at heritage sites and museums in the Communist and post-socialist periods

My research Objectives are;

- 1) To explore the “democratisation of memory” in relation to national identity by analysing the representation of three selected “myths” of Albanian national identity at heritage sites and museums;
- 2) To research how these myths have been shaped and reshaped in the discourses of key actors involved in shaping heritage;
- 3) To evaluate the usefulness of the concept of the ‘democratisation of memory’ in explaining memory and the construction of national identity in other contexts.

Through a comparative analysis of the “democratisation of memory” of three different myths of Albanian national identity I explore and analyse the occurrence of different types or patterns of the “democratisation of memory” and the ways in which these can emerge in relation to different myths and memories even within one country. The selected myths of Albanian national identity are;

- The myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity; the foundation myth of the Albanian nation and a myth which represents the Albanian people as being autochthonous to the south-west Balkan region (chapter 4)
- The myth of Skanderbeg; the Albanian national hero who held back the advance of the Ottoman Empire for more than twenty years during the fifteenth century and who thereby – according to the popular myth – saved Western Europe from Ottoman invasion (chapter 5)
- And myths and memories of the Stalinist dictator Enver Hoxha and of the era of his rule; a historical figure and an era of Albanian history which remain hotly contested and politically divisive within Albania (chapter 6)

These myths were selected because they are important or key myths of Albanian national identity, and also because they allow for the analysis of contrasting types or patterns of the “democratisation of memory”. The myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the myth of Skanderbeg are popular myths of national identity in contemporary Albania while myths and memories of Enver Hoxha and the era of state-socialism are contested and divisive. For

this reason different types or patterns of the “democratisation of memory” have occurred in relation to these different myths and memories.

The “democratisation of memory” described by Atkinson (2008: 385) involves the challenging and undermining of “traditional” and “official” narratives by a “polyphony of voices” and the emergence of “a series of socially constructed interpretations of the past that serve different ends”. I will argue throughout this thesis that the particular “democratisation of memory” described by Atkinson (2008) is just one type or pattern of that phenomenon, and that different types or patterns of the “democratisation of memory” can occur in different contexts and in relation to different narratives, myths and memories. The context of post-socialist Albania, and the three different myths of Albanian national identity, provide an opportunity to demonstrate this and also to explore the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity.

During Albania’s state-socialist period representations of history, myth and memory at museums and heritage sites, as well as in schools and universities, in newspapers and books and so forth, were shaped or guided and closely monitored by the state. Museums and heritage sites (re)constructed narratives of the nation in accordance with the wishes of the ruling elite and typically disseminated them in a didactic and dogmatic fashion. The post-socialist era brought multi-party democracy; marketization; an openness to new ideas as well as to flows of money, goods and foreign tourists; and a reduction in both the role and reach of the state. These changes created a context in which it might be expected that the “democratisation of memory” would have taken place. And yet, as I will argue throughout my analysis, the “democratisation of memory” which has occurred in post-socialist era Albania is not the same as that observed and described by Atkinson (2008) in the context of the UK.

While Atkinson (2008) dwells on the way in which the “democratisation of memory” can allow “traditional” and “official” narratives to be challenged and undermined my research reveals that, in the context of post-socialist Albania, some “traditional” and “official” narratives of Albanian national identity – the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the myth of Skanderbeg - are actually bolstered by the “democratisation of memory” as they are represented and consumed in more ways and by more individuals than before. At the same time, my research shows that negative “official” post-socialist era representations of state-socialism *have* been challenged and undermined through the “democratisation of memory”.

The type or pattern of the “democratisation of memory” described by Atkinson (2008) *does* occur in post-socialist Albania, but only in relation to particular narratives, myths and memories and not in relation to others.

I will also argue throughout my analysis that the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity which I observed and analysed in Albania is quite different to that which Atkinson’s (2008) writings suggest. Atkinson (2008: 381) describes a population “shifting their gaze from the great stories of traditional historiography”. But this is not what I have observed in Albania. I will argue, with reference to empirical evidence, that some grand narratives of the nation – the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the myth of Skanderbeg - remain popular and have meaning and purpose in Albania. And I will argue that the “democratisation of memory” can, in some contexts, reproduce and even multiply signs, symbols and representations of the shared narratives, myths and memories which bind national “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) together.

Finally, the thesis therefore concludes (Chapter 7) with an exploration of the implications of the findings of this research for understanding memory and national identity and how these two processes are inter-related, by considering how this research supports or challenges the thesis of the democratisation of memory.

The main contributions to knowledge of this thesis are therefore that;

- The process described by Atkinson (2008) is just one manifestation of the “democratisation of memory”
- Different types or patterns of the “democratisation of memory” can occur in different contexts and in relation to different narratives, myths and memories.
- The “democratisation of memory” can, in particular contexts, reproduce and strengthen “traditional” and “official” narratives of the nation and reproduce national identities.

In the next chapter, the literature review (chapter 2), I present a critical development of literature on and related to the concept of the “democratisation of memory” as initially outlined by Atkinson (2008). I also discuss contrasting views on the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identities and explore the

complex relationships between the “democratisation of memory”, the process of globalisation and international geopolitics.

## 2.0. Literature Review

This chapter presents a critical development of literature on and related to the concept of the “democratisation of memory” as initially outlined by Atkinson (2008). Atkinson (2008) suggested this as a key development in the changing nature of the conjunction of heritage, memory and (national) identity in the C21st. While his overall argument is persuasive it is based on a very limited geographical context (mainly the UK) and has not been developed or applied significantly in other contexts. This chapter therefore presents an outline of the theory, relates it to other literatures and develops a critique which underpins the research and analysis undertaken in this thesis and its application in the context of the post-socialist world in general, and Albania in particular.

In section 2.1. I discuss Atkinson’s writing on the “democratisation of memory” as well as the writings of others who, while not using the term directly, have described and commented upon similar processes which have been occurring in parallel. In section 2.2. I relate the process of the “democratisation of memory” to the (re)construction of nations and national identities. After discussing the way in which places of memory – heritage sites and museums - have been used to construct national identity I go on to discuss a full “spectrum” of opinion regarding the effect which the “democratisation of memory” will have, or is having, on nations and national identities. In section 2.3. I argue against the notion that a singular elite led discourse on heritage, history and identity can be identified today in “the West” and discuss the emergence of “liberal” and “universalist” discourses on heritage, history and identity at some major “Western” museums over the last three decades. In section 2.4. I review literature which provides insight into the way in which the “democratisation of memory” has occurred in the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). I discuss the trend toward illiberal democracy in some of those countries and suggest that this can involve an illiberal “democratisation of memory” which is quite different to the process described by Atkinson (2008). I also relate the “democratisation of memory” to the representation and (re)construction of “counter-memory” of state-socialism (Legg, 2005; Light and Young, 2015) and the widespread existence of popular nostalgia for state-socialism in CEE. Finally, in section 2.5. I discuss globalisation and geopolitics, how these processes can shape place and memory of place and how they can be related to the “democratisation of memory”. I begin section 2.5 with a discussion of Massey’s (1991) influential essay *A Global*

*Sense of Place*, a piece of work which provides a theoretical perspective from which to view the relationships between “local” places and global processes. Then I go on to discuss globalisation and uneven development and Giddens’ concept of “dis-embedding”, relating this to questions about the “democratisation of memory” and democratisation in general. After that I turn to geopolitics and the subject of popular geopolitics, discussing Said’s (2003) work on “imaginative geographies” and geopolitical power and then discussing a variety of works which apply Said’s ideas to the Balkan region and to Albania. I end section 2.5 by returning to Massey’s (1991) ideas and discussing the way in which her theoretical perspective can be used to understand the different forms which the “democratisation of memory” can take in different contexts and the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and national identities in those contexts.



## 2.1. The “Democratisation of Memory”

The term “democratisation of memory” was first coined by Atkinson (2008). It refers to a shift “from the great stories of traditional historiography towards more commonplace social and industrial histories” (Atkinson, 2008: 381) and from the production of “a singular uncontested history” by “experts who knew what was notable and important about our past” (Atkinson, 2008: 382) to the “emergence of plural voices that complicate, expand upon, dispute or undermine traditional “official” narratives of history”. The result of this “democratisation of memory” is, according to Atkinson (2008: 385), the supplanting of a singular “official” history and heritage by a

“...polyphony of voices that start to weave together a complex, shifting, contingent but continually evolving sense of the past and its abundant component elements”

A body of literature can be identified which charts, describes and analyses processes similar to, and occurring in parallel with, that which Atkinson (2008) calls the “democratisation of memory”. It is to that body of literature that I turn next.

Robertson (2016) has recently coined the phrase “heritage from below” to refer to museums, heritage sites, monuments and places of memory constructed or valorised by individuals, local communities and small “unofficial” organisations. Heritage sites of this nature, he writes, can be “both a means and a manifestation of counter hegemonic practices” (Robertson, 2016:7). Similarly Crooke (2007: 8) notes the expansion of what she calls the “unofficial museum sector” - that is museums which are independent of state institutions – and goes on to observe that these unofficial museums can provide “a means to articulate social and political concerns, contest official histories, and present alternative narratives” (Crooke, 2007: 10). Even where unofficial museums and heritage sites are not overtly political, she adds, they can “express the needs of ... local people and their concerns about preserving local identities” and may “express reaction to external processes or threats” (Crooke, 2007: 18). Samuel (1994: 27), too, observes the trend, writing of “the multiplication of do-it-yourself curators and mini-museums”. He later observes that, in recent times;

“...the notion of “heritage” has been broadened and indeed transformed to take in not only the ivied church and village green but also the terraced street, the

railway cottages, the covered market and even the city slum, not only the water-meadows painted by Constable but also the steam-powered machinery lovingly assembled in industrial museums” (Samuel, 1994:151).

As a result of such changes, Samuel (1994: 160) concludes, representation of the past is “inconceivably more democratic” than before.

The proliferation of heritage sites constructed or valorised “from below” and independently of the state is an important facet of the “democratisation of memory” but not, according to Crooke (2007), the only one. Crooke (2007: 33) highlights the role of the British New Right in furthering the democratisation of memory in the U.K. during the 1980s and beyond through a combination of cuts in spending on cultural institutions, an ideological aversion to “the nanny-state” and an ideological commitment to “self-help, the voluntary sector and the community”. In this climate museums were forced to become more responsive to the demands and preferences of the public in order to justify their existence and attract diminishing funds as well as willing volunteers. This, she writes, has occurred alongside a “shift away from the language of paternalism and towards a discourse of cultural democracy” (Crooke, 2007:26). Hall (2017: 219), too, writes of the way in which the implementation of neo-liberal policies has encouraged:

“...museums and other cultural institutions to reach out and engage with a wider cross-section of society on the basis of trying to generate necessary funding in an era of meagre governmental support”.

It is one way in which the “democratisation of memory” can be linked to an aspect of neo-liberal economic policy – the shrinking of the state.

Anderson (2004: 135) notes that the financial squeeze on museums has been compounded by “increasing competition from other leisure and educational options”. This, he argues, has forced museums to become more like those commercial visitor attractions against which they compete. Palmer (1999: 319), too, notes that, in recent times, heritage attractions often “operate in a very competitive market place” and so need to create a “product” that is popular. Similarly Urry and Larsen (2011: 153) observe that “The growth of theme parks, shopping malls and heritage centres have forced museums to become more market-oriented”. McCrone *et al* (1995: 8) believe that this trend has resulted in a “shift away

from narrow scholarly appreciation towards history as a form of entertainment, or “infotainment” in museums and at heritage sites. The writings of Anderson (2004), Palmer (1999), Urry and Larsen (2011) and McCrone *et al* (1995) appear to indicate that many “official” heritage sites and museums have become increasingly shaped “from below” in “the West”. What this means is that many places where elites once engaged in the construction of histories, myths and memories of the nation “from above” are now being shaped to an increasing extent “from below” by “the people” - though questions do arise as to exactly which “people” are visiting museums.

The tension between what Atkinson (2008: 382) describes as “official”, representations of the past and the “plural voices that complicate, expand upon, dispute and undermine” those “official” representations is the central theme of Laurajane Smith’s (2006) book, *Uses of Heritage*. Smith (2006: 11) critiques what she terms “authorised heritage discourse” (AHD); that is “a hegemonic discourse about heritage” which “acts to constitute the way we think, talk and write about heritage” and which “naturalises the practice of rounding up the usual suspects to conserve and “pass on” to future generations”. The “authorised heritage discourse” described by Smith (2006) is elitist and conservative and reproduces class structures and national identities. According to Smith (2006: 30), AHD puts both the conservation and the interpretation of heritage in the hands of experts who reproduce particular narratives and assumptions about the past:

“...it is architects, historians and archaeologists who act as stewards of the past, so that the present and future publics may be properly educated and informed about its significance” (Smith, 2006: 30)

She later adds that “AHD establishes and sanctions a top-down relationship between expert, heritage sites and “visitor” in which the expert “translates” ... the site and its meanings to the visitor” (ibid). It is exactly this “official” “top-down” kind of discourse of heritage and memory which Atkinson’s (2008: 382) “democratisation of memory” is supposed to “complicate, expand upon, dispute and undermine”. But while Smith (2006: 37) does write of the “increasing realisation of competing conceptualisations of heritage” as well as the initiation of “policies for greater community participation” by the governments of some “Western” countries she is less sanguine about the genuine transformative power of the apparent trend than Atkinson (2008), Crooke (2007) and Samuel (1994) describe. She seems to consider

“unofficial” museums and heritage sites peripheral rather than transformative, and suggests that policies presented as being designed to involve communities in heritage management “too often tend to be assimilationist and top-down in nature rather than bottom-up substantive challenges to AHD”. While for Atkinson (2008), Crooke (2007) and Samuel (1994) the “democratisation of memory” is something which has been and still is occurring for Smith (2006) it is something which ought to happen but has not yet been fully achieved.

The literature discussed above is all “Western-centric”; Atkinson (2008) and Crooke (2007) focus on the context of the UK while Samuel and Smith focus mainly on “the West” more broadly. Little research of the “democratisation of memory” in the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has been carried out, despite the fact that these countries would appear to present rich opportunity for the study of the process. The processes of democratisation, marketization and liberalisation, and the opening up to global flows of ideas – or in short the transition to “Western” norms which was once expected to occur in the post-socialist countries of CEE – might be expected to bring forth the same kind of “democratisation of memory” as has occurred (according to Atkinson, (2008)) in “the West”. Yet, as Verdery (1996) observes, the post-socialist countries of CEE have not simply gone through transition to “Western” norms. Rather than thinking in terms of transition, she suggests, we should think in terms of “transformation” to something new (Verdery, 1996: 15). The study of the “democratisation of memory” in the post-socialist countries CEE, then, provides a valuable opportunity to discover how – indeed if – the “democratisation of memory” occurs in different contexts.

Albania provides a particularly interesting opportunity for the study of the “democratisation of memory”. The state-socialist regime of Albania - one of the most centralised and repressive the world has ever seen – kept the representation and interpretation of heritage under tight control and employed it for the purposes of education and propaganda. Following the end of state-socialist rule a rapid and dramatic transition – or better transformation – has occurred. The introduction of multi-party democracy, political and economic liberalisation, marketization and the opening up of the formerly isolated country to global flows of ideas, money and people; all this was transformational and would appear to favour a particularly rapid and dramatic process of the “democratisation of memory”. But, as Verdery (1996) points out, transition to “Western” norms should not be

taken for granted. Through my research and analysis I address the following questions. Has the “democratisation of memory” occurred in post-socialist era Albania? Does the process differ from that in evidence in “the West”? How do any differences in the process relate to the particular political, geopolitical and historical context of Albania? And how does the “democratisation of memory” influence the (re)construction of Albanian national identity?

## **2.2. The “Democratisation of Memory” and National Identity**

In this section I will relate Atkinson’s idea of the “democratisation of memory” to processes of the (re)construction of national identity. As previously discussed, Atkinson’s (2008:381) term, the “democratisation of memory”, refers to the occurrence, in “the West”, of an ongoing transition from an era of elite-led “top-down” production and dissemination of collective memories to an era in which collective memories are to a far greater extent produced and/or shaped “from below” by individuals, and local communities and organisations. Atkinson (2008) does not refer to nationalism or national identities, though he does refer to “the great stories of traditional historiography” (Atkinson, 2008: 381) which typically refer to and reproduce the nation. Laurajane Smith (2006: 11) is clearer about the relationship between traditional “official” narratives of heritage and the reproduction of nation identities, stating that the “authorised heritage discourse” which she describes “takes its cue from the grand narratives of the nation and class on the one hand and technical expertise and aesthetic judgement on the other”.

Smith (2006) is far from alone in observing the role of “official” heritage, and of the experts and heritage professionals who identify, valorise and interpret that heritage, in the (re)construction of nations and national identities. Franklin (2003:25), for example, observes that heritage sites designated by heritage professionals as being of particular national significance have become “shrines of nationhood and the focus for secular forms of pilgrimage”. Light (2012: 12) similarly observes that “nation-states seek to anchor themselves in time and space through writing (or inventing) a “national” past and promoting popular attachments to the national territory” and that “In doing so, certain locations are inscribed and celebrated as being places of “national” significance”. He goes on to note that “the resonance of national places will be limited unless the wider population understands their significance”, adding “This is where the role of tourism in nation building becomes apparent: there is no better way to appreciate the significance of a national place than by travelling to it” (Light, 2012: 12). This is how heritage sites can contribute to the (re)construction of nations and national identities.

Museums have often played a special role in the construction of national identities, especially those designated as national museums, as Bennet (1995), Ostow (2008) Aronsson (2011) and others have pointed out. Smith (2006: 197) notes that:

“Museums in the nineteenth century ... developed in the context of tensions over nation-state formation, and became inextricably bound with the expression of national identity – as “national museums” formed to help define and express what it meant to be a citizen of a particular nation” (Smith, 2006: 197)

And similarly Knell *et al* (2012:13) state that many national museums:

“...were formed to build walls around communities, to act as cultural armaments that defined the self and the other and established world views through the lens of the nation”.

If, as Smith (2006), Light (2012), Franklin (2003), Bennet (1995), Knell *et al* (2012) and others believe, “official” heritage sites and museums are places at which elites and experts work to (re)construct nations and national identities the “democratisation of memory” might be expected to have profound consequences for the nation-state. It is, I think, instructive to consider the following statement made by Gillis (1994) – a statement which echoes Anderson’s (1983) notion of “imagined communities - :

“National memory is shared by people who have never seen or heard of each other, yet who regard themselves as having a common history”. (Gillis, 1994: 7)

If it is this shared memory – or a multiplicity of shared memories - which binds Anderson’s (1983) national “imagined communities” together, might the “democratisation of memory” have the potential to fragment those national “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) into smaller communities of shared memory? Might the “democratisation of memory” undo the work of nation-building elites? It is to that literature which addresses the potential consequences of the “democratisation of memory” for the nation that I turn next.

As noted previously, Atkinson (2008) does not discuss nations or nationalism directly. He does, however, write of the way in which the “democratisation of memory” can allow the challenging and undermining of “the singular narratives offered by “official” heritages” (Atkinson, 2008: 385). If those “singular narratives” are narratives of the nation then this might be expected to lead to a fragmentation of national identity. Laurajane Smith is, once again, more explicit about the relationship between heritage, memory and national identities, suggesting that:

“...traditional and authorised definitions of heritage tell nationalising stories that simply do not reflect the cultural or social experiences of subaltern groups” (Smith, 2006: 36)

She considers the “democratisation of memory” a process that, in theory, might allow these subaltern groups to take control of the (re)construction of *their own* memories and myths without interference from the nation-state. She writes:

“The ability to control and define the experiences of being in place, and of remembering and meaning making, are central to defining identity, and asserting and making sense of an individual and community’s place in the world and the social, political and cultural networks in which individuals and communities may reside. This ability is also central *to embodying and asserting challenges to authorized and received perceptions of identity*” [italics mine] (Smith, 2006: 290).

While Smith (2006) views the “democratisation of memory” as potentially liberating but not yet sufficiently advanced, Ames (2004) considers the process to have already had a profound effect. Today, in “the West”, he avers, museums and heritage sites have typically changed and adapted so as to “meet the multiple demands of ethnically and socially *diverse publics*” [italics mine] (Ames, 2004: 94). This, he believes, is already contributing to a post-modern fragmentation of grand narratives and a fragmentation of society. Ames (2004) assessment of the kind of discourse typically observed at museums and heritage today is strikingly different to that of Smith (2006), but both see the potential of the “democratisation of memory” to undermine traditional, “official”, narratives of nations and national identities. MacDonald (2003:5) makes a similar observation to Ames (2004), suggesting that society may be “becoming differentiated into diverse interest groups with little sense of larger community”. Considerably less sanguine about the potential consequences of the “democratisation of memory” than Atkinson (2008) and Smith (2006), MacDonald avers:

“The nation state looks like it might be in trouble ... Threatened from within by the emergence of powerful separate interest groups, ethno-nationalisms, regionalisms and various new age movements; and from without by more transnational powers such as global corporations and supranational organisations;



both its ability to claim the affection of its members and to govern them effectively have been questioned". (MacDonald, 2003:5)

But there are others who do not consider the diversification of heritages produced by the "democratisation of memory" so likely to fragment the nation-state. Confino (1997: 1399) writes that:

"National memory ... is constituted by different, often opposing, memories that, in spite of their rivalries, construct common denominators that overcome on the symbolic level real social and political differences to create an imagined community".

As long as sufficient "common denominators" exist, then, the nation-state and national identities can cohere despite an increasing diversity of heritages and memories. Samuel (1994: 160) considers the "democratisation of memory" to be a process which makes nation-states more open and inclusive and so *more*, not less, cohesive:

"The new version of the past ... [brought about through the "democratisation of memory"] is inconceivably more democratic than earlier ones, offering more points of access to "ordinary people", and a wider form of belonging"

It is instructive to relate these ideas to Edensor's (2002:17) notion of a "cultural matrix". Edensor (2002: 17) writes:

"A sense of national identity [] is not a once and for all thing, but is dynamic and dialogic, found in constellations of a huge cultural matrix of images, ideas, spaces, things, discourses and practices".

When national identities are thought about and imagined in this way, rather than as simply constituted by singular historical narratives constructed "from above" by nation-building elites, they seem more robust, less likely to be fragmented by the "democratisation of memory". A "huge cultural matrix of images, ideas, spaces, things, discourses and practices" (ibid) can provide a plenitude of what Confino (1997: 1399) calls "common denominators" and of what Samuel (1994: 160) refers to as "points of access". As long as sufficient "common denominators" (Confino, 1997: 1399) and "points of access" (Samuel, 1994:160) continue to exist so – in theory – can national identities.

It is instructive to relate the “democratisation of memory” to ideas about “banal”, “popular” and “everyday” nationhood and nationalism (Billig 1995, Edensor, 2002; Skey and Antonisch (2017); Fox and Miller-Idriss, (2008); Whitmeyer, 2002). Indeed Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008:537) refer to “nationalism “from below”” in their paper on “Everyday Nationhood”; a paper in which they expound upon the ways in which “nationhood is produced and reproduced in everyday life” by “ordinary people” (ibid). Edensor (2002:11) acknowledges that, historically, nation building may have been a “top down” elite led process but stresses that, once established, nations can become:

“...“naturalised”, absorbed into a common-sense view about *the way the world is*, and invested with moral values, which elevate the national over other social groupings”

Once this has occurred much that is “everyday” can become understood unreflexively as being of the nation (Edensor, 2002, Billig, 1995). These everyday objects and practices, as well as “grand narratives” and “official” representations of the nation, become interwoven into the “cultural matrix” discussed above (Edensor, 2002: 17). A proliferation of representations/constructions of “heritage from below” (Robertson, 2016) can potentially add to this matrix, particularly if that which is represented or constructed is framed as being a facet of the nation, and thus the “democratisation of memory” might – again, in theory - actually strengthen rather than weaken the nation and national identity.

In the previous section I discussed the writings of McCrone *et al* (1995), Palmer (1999), Anderson (2004) and Urry and Larsen (2011) on the commercialisation of “official” heritage sites and museums and argued that, where this has occurred, it may have made them more responsive to demand “from below” and hence more “democratic”. Palmer (1999) goes on to relate this commercialisation to the (re)construction of national identities noting that, due to the need to maintain popular appeal, established museums and heritage sites sometimes fall back on pre-existing popular narratives – and in particular on popular *national* narratives – rather than risking new or challenging ones. Thus, she points out, the stories told at heritage sites and museums tend to be told in “a particular type of language, designed to create an image of nation-ness” and to be “exciting, glamorous, [and] able to fill people’s hearts with a glow of national pride” (Palmer, 1999:319). It appears, then, that the (re)construction of national identity can occur *in response to popular demand*. Heritage sites and museums can

come to reflect populist nationalism. This is democratic, inasmuch as it is created in response to the preferences of “the people”, but it may also lead to illiberal and exclusionary narratives of nationhood. It is to this tension between democracy and liberalism, between the “democratisation of memory” and the “liberalisation of memory” that I turn next, drawing on recent work by Mounk (2018).

Mounk’s (2018) recent book, *The People Vs Democracy* is about democracy in general, not about the “democratisation of memory”, but the points that he makes are salient nonetheless as his ideas can usefully be applied to the “democratisation of memory”. Mounk (2018: 8) points out that liberal democracies “are full of checks and balances that are meant to stop any one party from amassing too much power and to reconcile the interests of different groups”. He goes on to observe that populist political leaders, such as Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban and Poland’s Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who preside over increasingly illiberal democracies, are “deeply democratic” inasmuch as “they believe that the *demos* should rule” but also “deeply illiberal” as “they openly say that neither independent institutions nor individual rights should dampen the people’s voice” (Mounk, 2018: 8). The tension between populist “winner-take-all” democracy and liberalism with its checks and balances on power can be related to the “democratisation of memory”. A liberal government, or a liberal institution or organisation, will protect the right of subaltern groups to represent their memories and identities while a government, institution or organisation that is populist, or which is in hock to populists, may only defend the right of the majority to represent their memories and identity. What Atkinson (2008) describes as “the democratisation of memory” is, in fact, a particularly *liberal* kind of “democratisation”. Mounk (2018) makes it clear that democratisation is not always liberal and, I suggest, it should not be taken for granted that the “democratisation of memory” will always be liberal either. The “democratisation of memory” can result, as Palmer (1999) observes, in the (re)construction of populist and potentially illiberal narratives of nation and national identity.

I began this section by briefly covering some of that literature which describes, from an instrumentalist perspective, the role of elites and heritage professionals in (re)constructing nations and national identities “from above” at “official” heritage sites and museums. I then went on to discuss a “spectrum” of opinions regarding the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and national identity. I discussed the views of those who, like

Atkinson (2008) himself, see the “democratisation of memory” as a welcome trend which is liberating, or has the potential to liberate, individuals, local communities and, in particular, subaltern groups, from the conservative and oppressive hegemony of “elites”. I then discussed the contrasting views of those who, on one hand, see the “democratisation of memory” as likely to weaken and fragment national cohesion and those who, on the other, consider it possible for a growing diversity of memories, heritages and identities to coexist within the nation-state without a shared sense of national identity being undermined or supplanted. After that I briefly discussed theories of “popular”, “everyday” and “banal” nationalism and suggested that, when viewed from these theoretical perspectives, the “democratisation of memory” can appear likely to strengthen national identities if diverse the heritages and memories represented and (re)constructed are framed or perceived as being “of the nation”. Finally I discussed Palmer’s (1999) suggestion that the commercialisation of “official” heritage sites and museums can lead them to represent populist nationalist narratives, and related her ideas to Mounk’s (2018) writings on liberal and illiberal kinds of democratisation.

It is evident that there is a broad range of opinion and little consensus on what the “democratisation of memory” means for national identities and nations. It may be that the outcome varies with context. Clearly more research is needed in this area. It is one of the key aims of my research to analyse the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and national identity in the context of post-socialist Albania, not only to gain an understanding of what is happening in this under-studied context but also to contribute to the wider discussion and debate on the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and national identity. I will address the following questions. How, if at all, has the “democratisation of memory” changed the way national identity is (re)constructed in post-socialist era Albania? Is the “democratisation of memory” fragmenting or strengthening national identity in that particular context? What can be learned from the Albanian context about the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identities more generally?

### 2.3. Multiple “Elites” and Multiple “Official” Discourses

Atkinson (2008: 385) writes of the “democratisation of memory” as a challenge to an official “fixed, constant, singular narrative”. But the existence of any such “singular” official narrative in “the West” today is questionable. Similarly the existence of the singular and monolithic “authorised heritage discourse” identified and critiqued by Smith (2006) is questionable. Arguably “official” representations of the past are more varied and diverse than Smith (2006) or Atkinson (2008) suggest. As Forest *et al* (2004: 362) point out, while instrumentalist accounts of the construction and valorisation of places of memory tend to imply that elites and experts “constitute a coherent group”, in reality “elites may have very different ideas about what places of memory mean, what forms they should take, what pasts should be remembered”.

In this section I draw on literature from the field of museology that reveals a recent shift toward “liberal” and “universalist” ways of representing heritage in some major “official” museums in “the West”. This challenges Smith’s (2006) notion that a singular “Western” hegemonic “authorised heritage discourse” is being “exported” around the world. As Albania has opened up to global flows of ideas since the end of the Cold War, and as Europe and the United States are the most influential hegemonic powers in the country, it is important to identify what ideas about heritage management might be “flowing” from “the West” into Albania today. These ideas are not, I will argue, limited to the kind of conservative and nationalist “authorised heritage discourse” described by Smith (2006).

As noted above, some major museums in “the West” have recently adopted what I will term “liberal” and “universalist” approaches to the interpretation and representation of their collections. I will begin with a discussion of the “liberal” approach. In their survey of museum practices at national museums across Europe Knell *et al* (2012) contrast the conservative-didactic approaches to memory of some national museums with the more liberal approaches of others. Of the liberal approach they write:

“[it] permits the audience greater autonomy in negotiating meaning or allows it some understanding of what lies behind the authority of the museum. Knowledge here is understood to be in development – more ephemeral and fugitive – and the position of authorities is constantly exposed” (Knell *et al*, 2012: 18)

This liberal approach is one which aims to empower the individual to make up their own mind. Knell *et al* (2012) illustrate this liberal approach with the example of an interpretation panel in the prehistory gallery of the *Historiska Museet* in Stockholm, Sweden. The panel reads:

“Who tells your history? The same object or the same event can be shown in different ways. It depends on who is doing the telling. There are groups today who use history to strengthen their identity. What about the group identities that existed in prehistory, can we discover and understand them today?”

(Interpretation panel in the *Historiska Museet* pictured in Knell *et al*, 2012: 8)

This invites the visitor to deconstruct established narratives and to make up their own mind about what they believe. This is clearly a quite radical departure from the role of the national museum as a “temple” or “shrine” of nationhood where a singular narrative of national history is told didactically “from above” and where a singular national identity is (re)constructed.

Another “liberal” trend which can be observed in some museums in “the West” is the promotion of multi-culturalism. Bodenstein and Poulot (2012) note that since 2000 a number of museum projects have promoted multi-culturalism in France, Ames (2004) observes a promotion of multi-culturalism in some American Museums and MacDonald (2003) has identified a similar trend in the U.K. I will not discuss the relationship between multi-culturalism and national identity here as I have done so in the previous section. The point I want to make is that this trend toward the promotion of multi-culturalism at “official” museums in “the West” is a significant shift away from the kind of didactic, assimilative, conservative “authorised heritage discourse” described and critiqued by Smith (2006).

There has also been a shift toward the promotion of a “universalist” world view at some major museums in “the West”. Before discussing “universalist museums” I want to briefly outline the ideas they deconstruct; that is a *linear* view of nations and national histories. Anderson (1983) writes of the way in which the construction of nations and national identities involved the projection of national “imagined communities” into the past. Through this processes linear conceptions of nations as enduring entities with long histories were created. These linear national histories were then represented and “evidenced” at heritage sites and museums. As Aronsson (2011: 31) observes;

“The *traditional* grand narratives of national museums are built out of embedded ideas about the linearity of history ...” [italics mine].

I italicise *traditional* because at some major “Western” museums things have changed. Museums such as the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and the British Museum in London have adopted a “universalist” perspective in the representation and interpretation of their collections.

Gorman (2011: 152) writes of “universalist museums” which adopt the “universalist depiction of difference and cross cultural influence”. This emphasis on cross-cultural influence ties in with and reflects ideas about culture of the kind expressed by, for example, Hannerz (1987) and Hall (1995). Hannerz (1987) writes of a “world of movement and mixture” and a “world in creolisation” and claims that “there are now no distinct cultures, only inter-systemically connected creolising Culture” (Hannerz, 1987: 551). And in a similar vein Hall (1995:187) states that:

“Culture is not settled, enclosed or internally coherent ... culture, like place, is a meeting point where different influences, traditions and forces interact”.

By emphasising cross-cultural influence and the cultural hybridity which results academics like Hannerz (1987) and Hall (1995) undermine and challenge linear conceptions of national histories, and museums which adopt a “universalist” approach to the representation and interpretation of their collections do the same. They blur imagined boundaries between this culture and that, this nation and the other.

The Ashmolean is an example of a “universal museum”; a museum which represents the culture and history of humanity as a whole rather than that of any particular nation-state. The following quote from the strategic plan of the Ashmolean Museum illustrates the distinctively “universalist” outlook of this institution:

“The *story of humanity* is at the heart of what we do. Making connections of *what we have in common as humans* (beliefs and belonging, creativity, delight and communication) and how that is shared across space and time...” [Italics mine](Ashmolean, 2014: online)

Dibley (2011:155) writes of the “manifestos of cosmopolitanism” of museums like the Ashmolean, the British Museum and the Louvre and goes on to refer to the International Council of Museums’ (IOMC’s) “Declaration of the Importance and Value of Universal Museums” as “the formal expression of this cosmopolitanism”. The declaration, which was signed by the directors of eighteen major institutions in Europe and North America in 2002, urges its readers to “acknowledge that museums serve not just the citizens of one nation but the people of every nation” (Dibley, 2011: 156). The “universal museum” sets out to tell the story of humanity, not the story of this or that nation. That major “official” institutions like the British Museum, the Louvre and the Ashmolean have adopted a “universalist” way of representing the past brings in to question notions of a singular “authorised heritage discourse” of the kind described by Smith (2006). The development of the “universalist” discourse which is in evidence at the Ashmolean and other major institutions in “the West” is a significant trend, and it raises questions about *which* ideas – if any - are currently being “exported” from “the West” and adopted elsewhere.

The ideological underpinnings of the “universal museum” are often raised in debates about the repatriation of artefacts like the Elgin Marbles. These debates highlight the opposition of “nationalist” and “universalist” approaches to conceptions of heritage. Those who favour the repatriation of artefacts like the Elgin Marbles couch their arguments in terms like “cultural patrimony” and “national heritage”. Cuno (2009: xi-xii), who argues passionately in favour of the existence of “universal museums” and the importance of the “universalist” world view which they seek to propagate, writes of the Elgin Marbles:

“They have come to be treasured as critical to the identity of the modern [Greek] nation-state, a vital link with its imagined ancient past from which it claims to have been unjustly separated by more than one thousand years ... they are said to belong to Greece and to hold within them the very spirit of its people” (2009: xi-xii)

It is a way of thinking and feeling which can be applied to many objects and places of “national importance”. But Cuno (2009) gives such notions short shrift, attacking them on both intellectual and moral grounds. He rails against what he calls the “nationalist retentionist [sic] cultural property laws” of countries such as Greece and Italy, stating that such laws:



“...conspire against our appreciation of the nature of culture as mongrel, overlapping, and a dynamic force for uniting rather than dividing mankind [and that] ...they dangerously reinforce the tendency to divide the world into irreconcilable sectarian, or tribal, entities” (Cuno, 2009: xii).

When arguing against the repatriation of the “Elgin Marbles” and other artefacts Cuno (2009) contrasts, and describes in terms of opposition, linear-nationalist conceptions of culture and the kind of “universalist” conception of culture described by Hannerz (1987) and Hall (1995). Debates of this kind raise questions about notions of patrimony and sovereignty, about who heritage *belongs to*. It raises questions about the “democratisation of memory”; about who should get to decide how – and in the case of the Elgin Marbles where - heritage is represented and interpreted.

As mentioned earlier, Albania has, since the end of the Cold War era, opened up to global “flows” of ideas, including ideas about the representation and interpretation of heritage. Due to Albania’s geographical location, as well as due to its history and current geopolitical situation, it is “Western” ideas which are most influential there at the current time. I have argued in this section that there is not one singular “authorised heritage discourse” (Smith, 2006) in “the west”. Rather, a variety of ideas and approaches are in evidence at major “official” museums in “the West”. When analysing the ways in which Albanian museums and heritage sites are representing and interpreting heritage I consider not only *if* “Western” practices and approaches to the representation and interpretation of heritage have been adopted during the post-socialist era but *which* “Western” practices and approaches have been adopted, by which individuals and organisations and why. I will also relate the adoption, or non-adoption, of these ideas to the “democratisation of memory” and to the (re)construction of Albanian national identity. Are liberal and “universalist” ways of representing and interpreting heritage being exported to and adopted in Albania? Or are didactic and conservative practices more akin to Smith’s (2006) “authorised heritage discourse” more in evidence at museums and heritage sites in Albania? How do changes in the way heritage is represented and interpreted in Albania effect the (re)production of Albanian national identity?

## 2.4. The “Democratisation of Memory” in Post-Socialist Era Central and Eastern Europe

In this section I will assess the occurrence and nature of the “democratisation of memory” in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and relate the process to the (re)construction of national identities. Drawing on the ideas discussed above (in section 2.3.) regarding “liberal” and “illiberal” ways of representing and interpreting heritage, and on Mounk’s (2018) ideas about liberal and illiberal democracies (see section 2.2.) I will suggest that – although systematic analysis of this issue in the region is lacking – one trend that is occurring in countries which have been studied is the development of a particularly “illiberal” form of the “democratisation of memory”. I will also suggest that this is related to the wave of populist nationalism that is in evidence in parts of CEE and that it is producing localised – or “glocalised” - variants of Smith’s (2006) “authorised heritage discourse”. Later, though, turning to the specific issue of heritage dating from the era of state-socialism I will suggest that the “democratisation of memory” in the form of “heritage from below” (Robertson, 2016) – of small “un-official” museums and heritage sites which represent “counter-memories” (Legg, 2005; Light and Young, 2015) of state-socialism - has undermined and challenged “official” representations of state-socialism in parts of CEE. Before discussing the “democratisation of memory” in post-socialist CEE I want to briefly discuss the utilisation of heritage and the (re)construction of memory and identity by state-socialist governments as this is the context from which post-socialist change begins.

Verdery (1996) observes that, under state-socialism, firms and other institutions competed, not for markets or customers as in capitalist countries, but for supplies and funds from those higher in the state hierarchy. While Verdery does not mention museums or heritage sites specifically it seems highly likely that these institutions were also focused upon the acquisition of funds and assets from the state. The state, or rather those ruling elites at the apex of the state, were clear about the role they wanted museums and heritage sites to play. Propaganda became the *raison de’etre* for most museums under state-socialism. Badica (2011:275) writes that “museum practice in the communist era overemphasised propaganda and the place of a single master narrative” adding “there was to be just one way, one story”. While Smith (2006) refers to the existence of a singular, didactic “authorised heritage discourse” (AHD) in “the West” it is clear that other kinds of AHD have existed in different places and different contexts. I suggest that state-socialist era Albania can be considered to

have had a specific and tightly controlled AHD, that the narrative content of heritage sites and museums was both guided and closely monitored by the ruling elite of the regime at that time.

Not long after the end of the Cold War Verdery (1996:15) wrote that, “...to assume we are witnessing a transition from socialism to capitalism, democracy, or market economies is mistaken”. She went on to suggest that “transformation” was a better term to apply to the processes going on in the post-socialist states of CEE than “transition”, adding that “these transformations will produce a variety of forms, some of them perhaps approximating Western capitalist market economies and many of them not” (ibid). In this she was prescient. Countries in CEE do appear to have gone their own way, and in some cases – most notably those of Hungary and Poland - turned to nationalism and an illiberal form of democracy (Mounk, 2018). The literature I will discuss below suggests that the narrative content of museums and heritage sites often reflects the different paths which the post-socialist countries of CEE have taken.

There is a paucity of published research on the “democratisation of memory” in the post-socialist states of CEE, but insight can be gleaned from sources which, while not specifically focusing on the “democratisation of memory”, nonetheless provide relevant information on, or indicators of, the process. The first source I want to discuss is Apor’s (2011) study of museum practice in Hungary. Apor (2011:94) reports “fierce debates” amongst Hungarian museum professionals over whether museums should:

“...focus on traditional scientific, in many cases elitist, activities of preservation and education, or, rather, prioritise programs for generating income and meeting the expectations of wider audiences, which would often expose the museums to sheer consumerist orientation and interest”.

Though not framed as such this is a debate about the “democratisation of memory”; about whether museums should be shaped “from below” by demand from the general public or “from above” by “elites” and specialists. Such debates mirror those which have taken place – and which still take place - in “the West”, but the outcome has been different in Hungary. This can be related to the turn to “illiberal democracy” (Mounk, 2018) and populist nationalism which has occurred in that country.

In the late 1990s, Apor (2012) explains, the populist-nationalist Fidesz Party was voted into power and thereafter museums were utilised to promote the values and policies of the populist-nationalist government. In 2001, Apor (2011:95) continues, the Fidesz government passed legislation that:

“...shifted the emphasis on the balance of national and universal culture to a distinctly and uniquely national heritage, to which the government accorded special protection, since it was allegedly subjected to the menace of globalisation”.

In other words the right-wing populist-nationalist Hungarian government rejected a “universalist” view of place, culture and heritage in favour of an essentially nationalist one and passed legislation to ensure that this was the way heritage would be interpreted and represented by state institutions. It was a partial return to the kind of illiberal “top-down” management of museums, and of memory, typical of state-socialism (Badica, 2011), to a particular, localised, state-sanctioned AHD (Smith, 2006).

A similar process of the politicization of museums in the region is presented by Runnel *et al* (2011: 334) who focus on debate and opinion regarding the creation of a new Estonian National Museum following the collapse of the Soviet Union. They identify the existence of two competing discourses regarding both the architectural design of the building and the kind of narrative the proposed new museum should display. Of these they write that one was “popular, vernacular and traditional” and “possessed by the public” while the other was “intellectual, academic and architecturally postmodern” and “in the possession of the intellectuals”. The new museum became, for a time, a sort of battlefield in a “culture war” (Hunter, 1991) between liberal “universalists” on one hand and populist-nationalists on the other.

In Estonia as in Hungary the nationalists won out. The Estonian National Museum, which opened in 1994, reflects the popular nationalist discourse, displaying, as Runnel *et al* (2011: 334) put it, “an explanatory, fixed view of history based on essentialist views of culture” and communicating “a common sense discourse so well established in Estonian society that one might consider it the national cannon”. In common with the cultural protectionism of Hungarian museums, the Estonian National Museum treats national culture “as a bounded

entity – something to be secured and protected, using the physical evidence of material objects – which helps express a wider distinction between “them” and “us” (ibid).

Kutma and Kroon (2012:78) reflect on the politicisation of the Estonian National Museum during the late 1990s:

“The cultural and political role of the national museum was considered important in rhetoric and for political gain, which included strong individual interests or conservative national ideologies. The public debates began to circle around the possibility of losing national identity, selfhood or integrity as a part of the European conglomerate, whereas the opposition claimed to recognise and promote Estonia as a country and culture which had always been part of Europe, even if the West had forgotten or ignored it”.

The debate around the Estonian National Museum is, arguably, part of a broader conflict between liberal-universalist conceptions of culture, history and identity and populist-nationalist ones. While, as discussed in the previous section, some major “official” museums in “the West” have begun to represent and interpret their collections in ways which reflect and promote a “liberal” and “universalist” world view it appears that this turn is not occurring in Hungary and Estonia.

Kaluza’s (2011) assessment of museum practice in post-socialist Poland differs markedly from those reports of museum practice in Hungary and Estonia discussed above. Kaluza (2011:154) describes a turn to liberal practices at Polish museums, stating:

“[Polish] museums have shifted the idea of the museum conceptually, away from the treasure houses of national memory and towards places of meaning making and knowledge networking. The focus is now on the museum visitor, communication and dialogue; memory is not something kept but rather active and dynamic”.

That, however, was in 2011. If Kaluza visited Poland at the time of writing – in 2018 – his assessment would surely have been very different. Since the election victory of the populist-nationalist Law and Justice Party (PiS) over the liberal Civic Platform (PO) in 2015 Poland has, according to Mazzini (2017: online), “been swept by a wave of official historical revisionism”.

The most high profile manifestation of this revisionism has been the Law and Justice Party's attack on the recently constructed World War Two Museum in Gdansk. As Berendt (2017: online) observes, the new museum, which was commissioned by the previous liberal government, presented "an expansive and international view of the conflict". This epitomises everything the recently elected populist-nationalist PiS stands against. As a result the museum has become, like the National Museum in Estonia, a symbolic battle ground in a "culture war" (Hunter, 2001) between liberal-universalism and populist-nationalism. As Ciobanu (2017: online) explains, the case;

"...roughly reflects the split in the country as a whole between Poland's mostly urban liberals who ran the show until two years ago [as of 2017] and the nationalist Euro-sceptics from the Law and Justice party (PiS) who hold the reins today".

The PiS plans to revise the museum content. According to Jan Żaryn, a PiS senator and historian and one of the three reviewers that the Polish culture ministry has asked to evaluate the museum,

"The authors [of the museum content] made a strategic choice to cover up the Polish point of view in pseudo-universalism" (Żaryn quoted in Ciobanu, 2017: online)

"Pseudo-universalism" is, of course, a pejorative way of referring to the kind of universalism discussed earlier in section 2.3. It is apparent that the swing to "illiberal-democracy" (Mounk, 2018) which has occurred in Hungary, Estonia, Poland and other parts of CEE has involved an illiberal populist-nationalist "democratisation of memory". This is very different from the kind of open and liberal "democratisation of memory" described and celebrated by Atkinson (2008), but it is a "democratisation of memory" nonetheless.

The "democratisation of memory" should not be considered as necessarily being a singular process. Multiple processes of the "democratisation of memory" can occur at the same time and in the same place. That is, some aspects of a country's heritage might be opened to the "democratisation of memory" while other aspects are not, or some aspects of a country's heritage might be the subject of a populist illiberal kind of "democratisation of memory" while others might be subject to a more open and liberal kind of "democratisation

of memory". I turn next to the "democratisation of memory" in relation to heritage and memory of the era of state-socialism. As will become apparent it has proven to be a very different "democratisation of memory" to that described above. Drawing on a variety of sources I will argue that the "democratisation of memory" has undermined and challenged "official" representations of state-socialism in parts of CEE and reproduced popular nostalgic remembrances of the state-socialist past.

Light and Young (2015: 221) note the existence of "two seemingly contradictory trends" in many of the post-socialist countries of CEE. These are "the "official" rejection of the state-socialist era, and the existence of more nuanced and sometimes nostalgic "counter-memory" of that same past" (ibid). The "official" line on the state-socialist past can, in some instances, be put down to an "imperative to demonstrate allegiance to global and political orthodoxies (and make a claim for membership of transnational organisation such as NATO or the EU)" (Young and Light, 2015:221). In others, as Zhurzhenko (2007) observes, the state-socialist past is politicised for party-political gain. This appears to be the case in Albania where a self-styled "anti-communist" party, the Democratic Party, has frequently accused the Socialist Party opposition of "crypto-communism" (Vickers and Pettifer, 1997) (I will discuss the particular case of Albania in more detail in chapter 6).

"Official" anti-communist discourse is in evidence at a number of "official" museums and heritage sites in CEE. These include the House of Terror in Budapest (Rev, 2008), the Museum of Communism in Prague (Jones, 2011) the Sighet Memorial in northern Romania (Badica, 2011), and the *Mauermuseum* in Berlin (Danylow and Etges, 2013). Referring to the last of these, the *Mauermuseum* or Wall Museum in Berlin, Danylow and Etges (2013: 150) state that, "Based on what the museum communicates, most visitors could easily conclude that life was hell on earth for those in East Berlin and total paradise in West Berlin". In similar vein Badica (2011:283) describes a temporary exhibition in Romania's National History Museum in 2007 as "deeply anti-communist" and as aiming to display the "horrors and illegitimacy of state socialism in Romania". The exhibition discussed by Badica (2011) appears to have been staged in a didactic and "illiberal" style. Badica (2011: 283) notes the use of "propaganda objects and didactic explanations on the meaning of the exhibits" going on to suggest that this betrayed "the continuation of museum practices developed for the production of exhibitions during state socialism". This is the first of the two trends observed by Light and Young (2015). I turn

now to the second; to the “popular nostalgia for, and remembrance of” the state-socialist past (Light and Young, 2015: 221).

Nowhere in Europe has the phenomenon of nostalgia for the state-socialist era been more intensely studied than in Germany. Drawing on studies of German “*ostalgie*” and studies of nostalgia for the era state-socialism elsewhere I will now discuss some of the most relevant themes from that body of literature. One theme which is covered by a number of articles on “*ostalgie*” is that of a lost sense of being “at home”. Berdahl (2010:202) recalls a saying which was popular in the former FRG following reunification; “We have emigrated without leaving [home]”. *Ostalgie*, Berdahl (2010:202) suggests, may be in part “an attempt to reclaim a kind of *Heimat* (home or homeland), albeit a romanticised and hazily glorified one”. Godeanu-Kenworthy (2011:172) makes a similar point and goes on to observe that, even if technically inferior, certain recognisably East German products and artefacts have become valued for their “crucial role in the invocation of *a distinct East German past*” [italics mine]. These things have allowed East Germans to continue, in small ways, to feel “at home”. Bach (2002) points to the East German cigarette brand f6 as an example of this. Phillip Morris, who bought the brand after reunification and who was interviewed by Bach (2002:548) explains the resurgence in their popularity:

“The f6 stands for what’s good and trusted from days past and helps with the self-conscious articulation of East German identity ... this cigarette represents a part of East German cultural history that has come to stand for a significant portion of identity building for the citizens in the new federal lands”

The f6 cigarette brand is not the only example. Another is *Konsum Leipzig*, “a regional supermarket chain in Leipzig and one of the few surviving East German enterprises in a landscape dominated by western discount stores” (Berdahl, 2010:200). Berdahl (2010:200) quotes an employee of the company:

“It’s too bad that so much has been liquidated ... and only a few businesses here [in the former GDR] have survived. Among those survivors is our *Konsum Leipzig*, which has held its own against the powerful West German retail chains. *Konsum* is for us a part of our identity that has been preserved. We are proud of this”.



In addition to brands like f6 and *Konsum Leipzig*, which owe their popularity at least in part to their East German identity, there exist voluntary associations dedicated to the “documentation and preservation of everyday life” from the era of state-socialism who “allocate responsibilities among members for collecting everything from East German packaging materials to work brigade medals” (Berdahl, 2010:201). These meaningful objects have been placed in “informal museums, galleries and displays in community centres or people’s homes” (ibid) where they can be preserved and encountered. It is apparent and, I think, significant that the kind of things collected, preserved and displayed at the “informal museums and galleries” mentioned above were the stuff of popular, banal or everyday nationalism (Billig 1995, Edensor, 2002, Skey and Antonisch, 2017, Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008, Whitmeyer, 2002). The literature discussed above seems to suggest that it is not only the objects themselves which are being saved but a sense of place, a sense of home which they help, in some small way, to recreate.

Literature on nostalgia for the era of state-socialism in post-socialist Eastern Europe suggests that it is not only a sense of home but also a sense of pride which has been lost. Berdahl (2010), for example, writes of the pride which many East Germans felt for their jobs and places of work during state-socialism and the loss of that sense of pride following reunification. When it became apparent that many East German products were inferior to those produced in the west and when many jobs were lost and workplaces closed down in the former GDR all this, Berdahl (2010:197) suggests, “...undermined some of the very foundations of easterner’s identity and personhood”. Bach (2002:548) makes a similar point, noting that while the GDR was once “a leader among Easter Bloc nations ... once incorporated into the West, citizens of the former GDR were faced with a clear subordinate status”. Similarly Godeanu-Kenworthy (2011:63) writes that after reunification East Germans saw “their past and world view [] denied any relevance or value whatsoever”. Their work rubbishised, their status diminished and, in many cases, their world view disproven and irrelevant it is perhaps not surprising that many East Germans yearned for the past. This is not unique to the former GDR. Petrovic (2013: 97) writes that, in those countries which had, during the state-socialist era, been parts of Yugoslavia, “Heroes of Work” became “Victims of Transition”, that status and purpose as well as a steady income had been lost.

Berdahl (2010:201) notes that those “informal museums and galleries” created in order to preserve and display objects from the state-socialist era were supposed to “protect, instruct and dignify” East German state-socialist era heritage. To *dignify* GDR heritage may be particularly important to those who have created these places of memory. As Berdahl (2010:195) observes, official and private museum displays of GDR heritage in West Germany have often “affirmed and constructed an image of socialist backwardness as reflected in and constituted by its quaint and outdated products”. Those associations and individuals who create informal museums and galleries can take back control of the narratives attached to the artefacts on display, writing history from below and both liberalising and democratising memories of state-socialism in the former GDR.

While I have focused largely on literature about *ostalgie* in Germany because of its plenitude and richness I do not wish to give the impression that nostalgia for state-socialism is unique to the former GDR. Light and Young (2015) point out that places and practices of “counter-memory” have been observed in Romania, the Czech Republic and Hungary as well as the former GDR. Petrovic (2013) describes various sites of and practices of “heritage from below” which have been created in post-socialist era ex-Yugoslavian countries to preserve Yugoslavian era industrial heritage. In these post-Yugoslavian countries, she observes, “the memory of socialist industrial labour still has a lure, attraction and mobilising potential” (Petrovic, 2013: 98). In some areas of former Yugoslavia where there is no state-sanctioned official effort to preserve and remember state-socialist era industrial heritage, Petrovic (2013: 110) notes, “Many individuals devotedly collect, keep, preserve and exchange objects from destroyed factories and former industrial sites”. Interest in such objects, she continues, “does not reflect the “usual” collector’s passion for the old” but rather is “related to personal engagement with objects from one’s own past”. There is a marked similarity between this collecting of every-day objects from the socialist era in the context of the former-Yugoslavian countries and that described by Berdahl (2010) in the context of East Germany. The informal, unofficial museums and galleries described here are examples of the “heritage from below” highlighted by Robertson (2016). They are places of “counter-memory”, of “practices of remembrance that are out of alignment with the efforts of the state to shape and define the remembrance of the socialist era” (Light and Young, 2015: 221).

There has, over the last three decades, been a reassessment of nostalgia. Pickering and Keightly (2006: 919) observe that, until recently, nostalgia has often been “viewed as the conceptual opposite of progress, against which it has been viewed as reactionary, sentimental or melancholic”. Critiquing this notion they suggest that we should reconceptualise nostalgia:

“...in terms of a distinction between the desire to return to an earlier state or idealised past, and the desire not to return but to recognise aspects of the past as the basis for renewal and satisfaction in the future” (Pickering and Keightly, 2006: 921)

Bonnet and Alexander (2012: 2) have also critiqued the idea that “nostalgia exists in an inherently antagonistic relationship to change” noting that it can, in fact “provoke and influence politically purposeful acts of social renewal and change” (Bonnet and Alexander, 2012: 3). Blunt (2003: 717) uses the term “productive nostalgia” to refer to nostalgia which is “oriented towards the present and future as well as towards the past”. Wheeler (2016: 16) employs the term “productive nostalgia” to describe a desire for continuity and for the establishment and perpetuation of “connections with places in the present” and, similarly, Pickering and Keightly (2006: 923) use the term to describe a valuing of “continuities in counterpoint to what is fleeting, transitory and contingent”. This desire for some elements of continuity and stability seem likely to be particularly important for individuals living through the flux and uncertainty of post-socialist change.

As discussed earlier, the “democratisation of memory” has in some aspects been of an illiberal and populist-nationalist type in parts of CEE. But when it comes to heritage of state-socialism some sites of “heritage from below” represent/construct memories of state-socialism that are contrary to the anti-communist discourse of what are in some cases quite illiberal right-wing governments. In some instances the “democratisation of memory” is populist and illiberal, reflecting and contributing to the illiberal approach of particular governments to heritage and memory, but in other instances it allows the (re)construction of memories and narratives that run counter to the illiberal discourse of those same governments. The consequences of the “democratisation of memory” depend upon both context and on what particular aspect of heritage and memory one chooses to focus upon. There is no single predictable outcome of the “democratisation of memory” as it is a process which can lead to increased heterogeneity, instability and complexity. What is clear, though,

is that regarding the “democratisation of memory”, as in many other matters, the post-socialist countries of CEE have undergone transformation but not a straightforward transition to “Western” norms. It is, of course, the particular context of post-socialist era Albania which I focus upon in this thesis. I address the following questions. Is there evidence of an “illiberal” “democratisation of memory” in Albania? Is the kind of populist-nationalist representation and (re)construction of heritage and memory that has occurred in other parts of CEE in evidence in Albania? And regarding heritage of the state-socialist era. How is heritage from the state-socialist era represented in “official” discourse and at “official” heritage sites and museums in Albania? Is popular nostalgia for state-socialism in evidence in Albania, and have places of “counter-memory” (Legg, 2005; Light and Young, 2015) of state-socialism been constructed? How does heritage and memory of state-socialism contribute to Albanian national identity?

## 2.5. Globalisation, Geopolitics, Power, Heritage and Identity

In this section, taking inspiration from Massey (1991), I discuss some of the large scale regional and global processes which influence memory and identity at the national/local scale in Albania. I structure this section around two processes – globalisation and geopolitical change – though these are, of course, deeply interlinked. Taking globalisation first, I discuss Harvey's (1993) and Massey's (1991) writings on globalisation, disparities of power and geographically uneven development and Giddens's (1991) useful concept of "dis-embedding". I relate these ideas to the "democratisation of memory", focusing in particular on the relationship between democratisation, economic liberalisation and economic power. Then I turn to geopolitics and, drawing on Said's (2003) hugely influential book *Orientalism* as well as the writings of Todorova (2009), Blumi (1998), Hall (1999) and others, examine the complex relationship between "imaginative geographies", economic and political power, memory and identity in Albania and in the Balkan region more widely. Once again I relate this to the "democratisation of memory" and explore the relationship between democratisation, geopolitics and the power to shape ideas and "imaginative geographies".

Albania is a particularly interesting and instructive place in which to study the effects of both globalisation and changing geopolitics on the "democratisation of memory" and on the (re)construction of national identity. During the state-socialist era Enver Hoxha's regime worked to isolate most of the population from influence and interference from outside the state. Flows of people and ideas were strictly controlled. The regime also worked toward national self-sufficiency, minimising the need for trade. After the end of the state-socialist era, however, the country was liberalised and opened up to flows of all kinds; flows of ideas, flows of money, flows of goods and of people. This profound change can show up the effects of global flows and globalisation particularly clearly. Regarding geopolitics there has also been dramatic change. While, during the state-socialist era, "the West" was portrayed as being the enemy (or *an* enemy – the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were considered to be enemies too for some of that period), in the post-socialist era most Albanians and all major political parties in the country have striven to "return to" and be accepted by "the West" (while sadly "the West" has often been less than welcoming toward Albania and Albanians). This profound geopolitical reorientation provides a valuable opportunity for the study of the relationship

between geopolitics and “imaginings”, memories and representations of the nation, heritage, national identity and place.

Before discussing globalisation and Giddens’s (1991) concept of “dis-embedding” I want to discuss, briefly, Massey’s (1991) influential essay, *A Global Sense of Place*, as it provides a useful theoretical perspective from which to view the subjects I discuss in this section. In her essay Massey (1991: 26) argues against the notion that places have “single, essential identities”. She goes on to explain:

“Instead ... of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings *are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define, for the moment, as the place itself*, whether that be a street or a region or even a continent” [italics mine] (Massey, 1991: 28)

“Local” places, “local” identities and the memories of “local” individuals and communities, should be understood – according to Massey (1991) - as constantly being constructed and reconstructed by flows of people, ideas, money, goods and so forth which extend around the globe. Global processes shape local places, identities and memories. The “democratisation of memory”, then, must be understood as occurring (or not occurring) in a complex and dynamic milieu of global flows and geopolitical projects.

Globalisation can briefly be summed up as an ongoing process, or set of processes, through which disparate parts of the world are becoming more and more interconnected. As Appadurai (1996: 27) observes;

“...the world has been a congeries of large-scale interactions for many centuries.  
Yet today’s world involves interactions of a new order and intensity”

A number of geographers and social scientists have observed that globalisation has not occurred evenly and that this unevenness has social and political consequences (Lash and Urry, 1994, Massey, 1993, Appadurai, 1996, Giddens, 1991). Harvey (1993: 6) comments on the unevenness of globalisation;

“The geographical landscape that results [from globalisation] is not evenly developed but strongly differentiated. “Difference” and “otherness” is *produced* in space through the simple logic of uneven capital investment and a proliferating geographical division of labour” (Harvey, 1993: 6)

Giddens (1991: 64) writes that globalisation can be defined:

“...as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa”.

According to Giddens (1991: 19), as the process of globalisation has progressed, locales have become:

“...thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them ... [such that] the “visible form” of the locale conceals the distanced relations which determine its nature”.

It is this “lifting out” of agency from “localised contexts” which Giddens (1991: 53) calls “dis-embedding”. “Dis-embedding” is a useful concept which I will refer to frequently in my analysis because it raises questions about the “democratisation of memory” and, indeed, about democratisation more generally. Arguably “dis-embedding” is antithetical to the process of democratisation where it removes or “lifts out” from people the ability to shape their own environment according to the collective will. This “dis-embedding” effect has been referred to in critiques of neo-liberal economic policy. For example Featherstone (1993: 177) avers that:

“[Today] the dictates of market or administrative rationalities maintained by national elites or transcultural professionals and experts have the capacity to override local decision-making processes and decide the fate of the locality” (Featherstone, 1993: 177)

The “dis-embedding” effect of globalisation and economic liberalisation may be weakening the efficacy of democracy at the scale of the nation-state as well as at the scale of the regional and/or local. Giddens (1991: 66) writes that “Nation-states ... are becoming progressively less sovereign than they used to be in terms of control over their own affairs” while Lash and Urry

(1994: 280) go even further, declaring that globalisation has rendered many nation-states “no longer sovereign”. I suggest that some states are more “sovereign” than others, and that those living in small and poor countries like Albania may be more subject to and disempowered by “dis-embedding” than those in more prosperous circumstances.

As well as the concept of “dis-embedding” Giddens (1991) writes of what he calls “re-embedding”. This can take different forms, but what I want to focus upon here is “re-embedding” as a reflexive response to globalisation, as the efforts of individuals and organisations to resist the “dis-embedding” effects of globalisation or to somehow “re-embed” their lives in place.

Harvey (1993: 4) suggests that many people who feel they “have lost their roots” and “their connection to their homeland” actively seek “to recover a viable homeland in which meaningful roots can be established” (Harvey, 1993: 11). He adds:

“...the elaboration of place-bound identities has become more rather than less important in a world of diminishing spatial barriers to exchange, movement and communication” (Harvey, 1993: 4)

Attempts to “establish roots” or to “re-embed” can take a variety of forms at a variety of scales from the local to the national. Featherstone (1993: 177) writes of “nationalistic, ethnic and fundamentalist reactions to globalisation” (Featherstone, 1993: 177). The “democratisation of memory” - and especially the kind of populist, illiberal and anti-universalist “democratisation of memory” described in section 2.4. – should, I think, be understood in this context. And so should the kind of nostalgia for the state-socialist past described in section 2.4. Constructions of “heritage from below” of the kind described by Robertson (2016) are often attempts to “re-embed” or to “root” memory and identity in place. The same can be said of populist-nationalism and nostalgia for post-socialism.

I turn next to geopolitics. Dittmer and Gray (2010) note the development of a sub-field of geopolitics termed “popular-geopolitics”. This, they write, has developed from:

“...the recognition of geopolitics as something every-day that occurs outside of academic and policymaking discourse” (Dittmer and Gray, 2010: 1664)



Muller (2008: 333), in similar vein, writes of the importance of considering everyday life and “micro-contexts” when researching matters of critical geopolitics. This is an approach which recognises the kind of interconnection of the global and the local observed and highlighted by Massey (1991). It is a perspective which can be very useful when considering the occurrence and effects of the “democratisation of memory” and when analysing the narrative content of heritage sites and museums. Museums and heritage sites often act to shape people’s understandings and “imaginings” of place and this can shape their “geopolitical imaginations” in various ways. At the same time, the geo-political projects of states, political parties, supra-national organisations, businesses (especially media companies), NGOs, religious organisations and even individuals can all effect the context in which curators and heritage professionals live and work.

Dalby (2010) points out that the field of critical geopolitics has drawn greatly on the work of Edward Said, and in particular on his influential book *Orientalism*. In this book Said (2003) writes about the creation and recreation, by writers from the West, of an imagined geography of the Orient. The Orient was, Said (2003) explains, often portrayed in pejorative terms that reinforced notions of “European superiority over Oriental backwardness” (Said, 2003:7). This imagined hierarchy of civilisation served to justify European imperialism and colonisation. Thus the (re)construction of what Said terms “imaginative geographies” of “the Orient” had profound geo-political significance.

Said’s work has inspired a number of other books and studies of different “imagined” or “imaginative geographies”. One particularly relevant example is Wolff’s (1994) book *The Invention of Eastern Europe* in which he examines and deconstructs the imagined geography which divides Europe into East and West. Drawing on Said’s ideas Wolff (1994:7) avers that a variety of texts have “invented” an Eastern Europe that is “a paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, Europe but not Europe” and “an intellectual project of demi-Orientalization”. Another notable and relevant work which draws on Said’s ideas is Todorova’s book *Imagining the Balkans* in which she analyses the construction of “the Balkans” as an imagined “other of Europe” (Todorova, 2009: 3). She writes that:

“...at the same time that “Balkan” was being accepted and widely used as geographic signifier, it was already becoming saturated with social and cultural

meaning that expanded its signified far beyond its immediate and concrete meaning" (Todorova, 2009: 21)

By the early twentieth century, Todorova observes, the term "Balkan" had acquired a whole range of negative connotations. "Balkan", she writes;

"...while overlapping with "Oriental", had additional characteristics such as cruelty, boorishness, instability, and unpredictability. Both categories were used against the concept of Europe symbolising cleanliness, order, self-control, strength of character, sense of law, justice, efficient administration ..." (Todorova, 2009: 119)

Todorova is not alone in observing and writing about "Balkanism". The notion of the Balkans as a liminal space or as a fault line between East and West, Christianity and Islam, civilisation and barbarism is highlighted by Bjelic (2002:7) while Hammond (2007:119) notes that, "It was ... [in the Balkans] that enlightened Europe was supposed to end, and an unsettling world of savagery, mystery and archaic superstition supposed to begin".

Such "imaginative geographies" of the Balkan region remain extant today. As Todorova (2009: 136) points out a "new wave of utilizing "Balkan" and "Balkanisation" as derogative terms" followed the end of the Cold War. The break-up of Yugoslavia and the resulting conflicts entrenched Balkanist imagery and assumptions in the "western" imagination during the 1990s. As Todorova (2009:136) puts it, "the persistent use of "Balkan" for the Yugoslav war ... rekindled old stereotypes and licensed indiscriminate generalisations about the region". O'Loughlin and Kolossov (2002:578) make a similar point:

"Unfortunately, much of the analysis of the 1990s Balkan crisis characterises the [Balkan] region as an irrational, hostile, barbaric place populated by bloodthirsty, armed civilians out to avenge ancient tribal defeats".

As previously noted, Said (2003) saw Orientalism as having been a means to justifying imperialism and colonialism. No doubt critical geo-politics still has much to reveal about "neo" and "crypto" imperialism and colonialism today. What I want to discuss next, however, is the relationship between "imaginative geographies" of Eastern Europe and/or the Balkans and accession to the European Union (EU). It is to that relationship that I now turn.

Light and Young (2009: 286) note that during the build up to Romania's accession to the EU, "media representations in the [British] tabloid press were dominated by Balkanist discourses". Papers such as *The Sun* and *Daily Mail* ran stories which bolstered Balkanist assumptions about the innate criminality of Romanians and Balkan peoples more generally and which heightened fears of an "invasion" of immigrants following accession (Light and Young, 2009). Romania did join the EU, along with Bulgaria, but this kind of Balkanist discourse may arguably make accession harder, if not unachievable, for other countries in the Balkan region. Alpion (2005: 9) goes so far as to state that while "every Balkan country is keen to join the European Union" in many cases, including that of Albania, "their hopes and ambitions ... have been dashed because of the negative image the region has in the West".

Governments of those countries which aspire to membership of the European Union but which are the subject of pejorative Balkanist representation have great difficulty in countering or refuting Balkanist discourse. There is a great disparity between different countries in their power to represent place and identity. As Edensor (2002) observes:

"...within images and flows there is great inequality between nations, between those who have a large technological infrastructure and are home to global media corporations which are able to transmit hegemonic meanings globally via visual means and those ... lacking the means to produce and circulate a vast array of images of their own..." (Edensor, 2002: 143)

This is an instance of the process of "dis-embedding" described by Giddens (1991); national and regional "imagined geographies" are projected from "the West" with profound political and economic consequences over which neither governments nor publics in the Balkan region have much control or influence. One way in which the governments of countries like Albania do attempt to change perceptions and tackle negative stereotypes is through engagement with foreign tourists at heritage sites and museums.

Both Lanfant (1995) and Light (2000; 2001; 2012) highlight the way in which the governments of nation-states use – or try to use – tourism promotion as a way of projecting a particular national image and identity to an international audience. As Light (2001: 1055) puts it:

“In presenting “itself” in the way it wants to be seen by Others, a country can make a statement to those Others of “who we are” and “how we want you to see us””.

In his book, *The Dracula Dilemma*, Light (2012) explores in some detail the tension between Balkanist imaginings of Romania constructed in “the West” and the aspirations of many Romanians that their country be seen as a modern European state. The particular facet of Romanian identity (as imagined in “the West”) through which Light (2012) explores these issues is the country’s association with Count Dracula. Dracula, the hugely popular character from Bram Stoker’s novel, is, notes Light (2012: 1), “almost synonymous with Romania” in the imaginations of many people from outside of the country. The fact that widely held “imagined geographies” of the Romanian region of Transylvania - and to a lesser extent of Romania more widely - are shaped in large part by the fictional work of a British novelist is a striking example of how “imagined geographies” can be shaped from afar; a striking example of “dis-embedding” (Giddens, 1991). The identification of Romania with the vampire is unpopular in Romania itself; as Light (2012:2) puts it “no country would especially welcome being so closely associated with a predatory villain intent on destroying Western civilisation”. Dracula related tourism is potentially lucrative, however, and thus there arises the “dilemma” of the book’s title. Cash in on the association with Dracula and perpetuate the unwanted association or let an opportunity for economic development go by in an attempt to change perceptions. Light (2012: 129) reports that Dracula related tourism has been developed at major attractions such as Bran Castle and also that, in Transylvania:

“Many local shops, restaurants and hotels have had no reticence in exploiting the Dracula connection and make use of images of Dracula and vampires in their promotion” (Light, 2012: 129)

It appears that economic considerations have won out in that instance. In any case even if Romanians had not made the most of such opportunities it seems likely that the association of Transylvania with Dracula would have persisted. One of the conclusions of Light’s book is that Romanians have little influence over foreigners’ imaginings and understandings of Romania. This, adds Light (2012:157), “illustrates global inequalities and asymmetries in cultural power, particularly the power to represent”. This raises an important question. How do such “global inequalities” and “asymmetries of cultural power” (ibid) effect the “democratisation of memory”?

Elsewhere Light (2000) writes about “Western” tourists’ interest in Romania’s “unwanted” state-socialist past and the tension which this creates between the “imagined geographies” of those “Western” tourists and the national image the Romanian government wishes to project. For the post-socialist countries of CEE, writes Light (2000: 147):

“this interest in their communist past may be far from welcome and can raise various tensions between, on the one hand, the imperative to construct distinctly post-communist identities (in which there is little desire to remember the communist past) and, on the other, the desire to maximise the economic benefits of tourism”.

Thus tourist’s interest in post-socialist heritage in Romania and in other post-socialist countries creates a dilemma similar to that presented by Romania’s association with Dracula. Light (2000: 151) notes that, even though the Romanian government has not promoted Romania’s communist era heritage “travel guides written for Western tourists have been instrumental in promoting Bucharest’s legacy of communism and revolution for the gaze of Western visitors”. Later he goes on to point out that:

“This is an externally defined heritage, constructed outside Romania for non-Romanians, in which English-language travel guides play a key role” (Light, 2000: 154).

This can be seen as another example of “dis-embedding” (Giddens, 1991). Neither the Romanian people nor the Romanian government are able to control or greatly influence how “their” heritage is imagined, seen, understood by others from outside of the country. Furthermore the commodification of state-socialist era heritage, like the commodification of the county’s association with Dracula, has reproduced “imaginative geographies” of Romania which are undesirable to both the Romanian government and many of the Romanian people. Again, this raises a question about the “democratisation of memory”, marketization and asymmetries of economic power. The “democratisation of memory” involves the representation and (re)construction of the memories of “ordinary people”. The commodification of heritage, by contrast, can involve the representation and (re)construction of the “imagined geographies” of foreign tourists. The question is, whether the two processes can coexist, or whether one process acts to preclude the other?

Now I want to return to Said's (2003) concept of "imagined geographies" and to discuss "imagined geographies" of Albania. That is, I want to discuss how Albania is commonly represented and imagined in "the West". The particularly harsh treatment of Albania by "Western" media, and especially by the British tabloids, has been commented upon by Hall (1999), Blumi (1998) and Alpion (2005). Hall (1999: 168) notes that, in the western media, Albania is typically represented as:

"... the antithesis of the European Union: anarchic, brutal, Islamic and a source of illegal economic migrants" (Hall, 1999: 168).

Similarly Blumi (1998:528) observes that:

"...the Albanian in today's headlines is the perfect example of how the Westernised world has retained [Balkanist] stereotypes of the nineteenth century for contemporary consumption".

That the kind of stereotypical "uber-Balkanist" representations of Albania observed by Hall (1999), Blumi (1998) and Alpion (2005) persist today can be evidenced by, for example, a recent article in the Express newspaper entitled "Why Brexit must NOT be delayed: Albania to start EU membership talks WITHIN MONTHS" [sic]. In this article the vehemently Eurosceptic Express newspaper refers to the possibility of Albania's accession to the EU as a pressing reason for a swift Brexit. The paper quotes, uncritically, the UKIP MEP Jane Collins:

"The Yorkshire MEP pointed to the country's dire global ranking in terms of corruption, and said its accession would include "not only huge transfers of cash from the British tax payer but the opportunity for free movement - and thus free movement of criminals". She added: "With our borders still a long way from fixed even post Brexit, the possibility of borderless routes from Albania to Northern Europe will be a concern to people in Britain - and rightly so" (Gutteridge, 2017: online)

The free movement of Albanian people is equated here with the free movement of criminals. That Albanians are inherently criminal does not need explanation or evidence - it is just assumed. This is the power of "imaginative geographies".

While the UK may be leaving the EU it seems likely that populist political parties within the EU, and the media companies which support them, will make Albanian accession politically problematic in the near future, and to a significant extent it is the kind of Balkanist stereotypes apparent in the article quoted above which create this barrier to EU membership. Sadly the following statement, penned by Hall (1999: 161) almost twenty years ago, remains true today;

“The need to overcome a vacuum of understanding – filled in recent years with essentially negative images – remains a major task in Albania’s attempts to join the European home” (Hall, 1999: 161)

An in depth discussion of the reasons why Albania has come to have such an “image problem” is beyond the scope of this thesis but I will discuss one important factor. That factor is religion.

In the Balkan region there is an apparent relationship between religion and the “imagined geographies” of Orientalism and Balkanism. This can be related to Bakic-Hayden’s (1995) concept of “nested Orientalisms”. Bakic-Hayden (1995: 918) explains the concept thus:

“In this pattern, Asia is more “East” or “other” than Eastern Europe; within Eastern Europe itself this gradation is reproduced with the Balkans perceived as most “Eastern”; within the Balkans there are similarly constructed hierarchies” (Bakic-Hayden, 1995: 918).

Todorova expands on this theme, noting that within the Balkan region:

“A Serb is an “easterner” to a Slovene, but a Bosnian would be an “easterner” to the Serb although geographically situated to the West; the same applies to the Albanians who, situated in the western Balkans, are perceived as easternmost by the rest of the Balkan nations” (Todorova, 2009: 58)

Slovenes are mainly Roman Catholic and Serbs mostly Orthodox and this, arguably, accounts for the perception of Slovenes as somehow more “western” than Serbs. Similarly the perception of Bosnia and Albania as somehow more “Eastern” than all the other countries in the region arguably has much to do with the fact that many Bosnians and Albanians are Muslims. This perception of Albania, perhaps alongside Bosnia, as “most eastern” and/or “most Balkan” is not limited to the Balkan region. According to Alpion (2005:8) the conversion

of many Albanians to Islam during the Ottoman era has long had “a detrimental impact on the image of the Albanians in the West”.

In order to evidence the fact that perceptions of Albania as an “Islamic country” may have, or may already be having, profound geo-political consequences for the country I turn next to Samuel Huntington’s influential book, *The Clash of Civilisations*. On the first page of this book Huntington sets the following scene:

“On April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1994 two thousand people rallied in Sarajevo waving the flags of Saudi Arabia and Turkey. By flying those banners, instead of U.N., NATO, or American flags, these Sarajevans identified themselves with their fellow Muslims and told the world who were their real and not so real friends” (Huntington, 2002:1)

To Huntington these two thousand people represented Bosnian Muslims – all Bosnian Muslims - and provided proof enough of his way of “seeing” the world as divided into discreet, and often antagonistic, civilisations which are rooted in religious belief. Referring to the break-up of Yugoslavia Huntington (2002: 127) writes that “the Balkans, once again, have been Balkanised along religious lines”. Regarding Kosovo he writes of “the straightforward territorial question between Albanian Muslims and Orthodox Serbs” (Huntington, 2002:130). On a map in Huntington’s book (Huntington, 2002: 27), on which the world is divided into discreet and seemingly homogenous “civilisations”, Albania is marked as (and so defined as) being “Islamic”. In fact a significant proportion of Albanians are Orthodox Christian or Roman Catholic. Even in Kosovo, where a large proportion of the population is Muslim, there are many Roman Catholic Albanians and contrary to Huntington’s simplistic understanding of the Kosovo crisis, both Muslim and Catholic Albanians were targeted in what was a campaign of *ethnic* cleansing (Hall, 1999, Pettifer and Vickers, 2009).

Huntington’s ideas matter. They been taken seriously by many people, particularly in the USA, and this has potentially serious consequences for Albania and South Eastern Europe more widely. In answer to the rhetorical question of imagined geography “Where does Europe end?” Huntington (2002:158) states “Europe ends where Western Christianity ends and Islam and Orthodoxy begin”. He later adds that “The identification of Europe with Western Christendom provides a clear criterion for admission of new members to Western



organisations” (Huntington, 2002:160). Clearly Huntington would have seen Albania as unsuitable for membership of the European Union – something to which most Albanians aspire – due to the country’s, in his view, intrinsically Islamic nature.

Hall (1999: 166) points out that perceptions of Albania as Islamic have at times been:

“...manipulated by less-friendly “Christian” neighbours, as in Serb attempts to justify actions against “fundamentalism” in Kosovo, although many Albanians there are in fact Catholic” (Hall, 1999: 166)

Hall (1999) is not alone in identifying a connection between representations of Albania as Islamic and the geopolitical strategies of Serbia. Alpion (2005:9) believes that “Albania’s perception in the West as an “Islamic” country has [] been reinforced because of Serbian propaganda since the end of the nineteenth century onwards” which presents Albanians as ““fanatic adherents” of the Islamic faith and as such as “non-Europeans””. And in similar vein Taji-Farouki and Poulton (1997:8) state that “Serbian extremists and mass media have energetically circulated reports that Bosnian Muslims – and by extension Muslims throughout the Balkans – are fundamentalists and fanatics”. This demonstrates the way in which geopolitics and media representations can be interconnected in ways which are not always immediately apparent.

As Smith (2006: 276) observes, “Heritage is a process of remembering that helps to underpin identity and the ways in which individuals and groups make sense *of their experiences in the present*” [italics mine]. Where the “democratisation of memory” occurs, representations and (re)constructions of memory and heritage – whether places of “heritage from below” (Robertson, 2016) or commercial or “official” heritage sites or museums shaped “from below” by demand – reflect the contemporary beliefs, concerns and aspirations of the people who create them and who use them. Contemporary context is key to understanding the way in which heritage and memory is represented and (re)constructed, and this is why I have dwelled on Albania’s geopolitical context above. Most “ordinary” Albanian people are fully aware of the way Albania is represented and imagined in “the West”, and of the geopolitical consequences of that negative representation – it effects them and they respond to it. The way heritage is represented and (re)constructed in Albania, both by state institutions

and by “ordinary people”, should be understood as existing in this context and as responding to it.

I began this section with a discussion of Massey’s (1991) essay *A Global Sense of Place*; an essay in which she convincingly argues against notions that particular places have essential identities. What gives a place its “specificity”, she points out, is “not some long internalised history” but rather the intersection of global flows and social relations (Massey, 1991: 28). As noted earlier, she calls on her readers to cultivate “a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local” (Massey, 1991: 28). This is useful theoretically. Indeed it is a theoretical perspective, a way of thinking about place and the meanings of place, which has informed my analysis throughout the research process. But at the same time I think it important to recognise that many people think about place differently. Linear narratives of place, notions of belonging and notions of sovereignty and ownership are all deeply important to many people.

The “democratisation of memory” is a process which allows people to represent and (re)construct heritage and memory in a way which is relevant and meaningful to them, in the present, and in the context in which they live. It is a process through which “ordinary people” become empowered to represent and (re)construct their own sense of place and their own sense of collective identity. While in some cases that sense of place may be the kind of “global sense of place” promoted by Massey (1991), in others it may be a more conservative, defensive, exclusive or, as Massey (1991: 26) puts it, “reactionary” sense of place. All of these ways of imagining and thinking about place and identity are shaped by the global milieu in which they exist and amidst which they are (re)constructed, and so Massey’s (1991) theoretic perspective can be used to understand them rather than simply to deconstruct and dispel them; to understand how and why they are valued and by whom, and to understand how they relate to social relations, to uneven economic development and to structures of power. Viewed from the global perspective promoted by Massey (1991), the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of place and memory which it brings about can be understood as being shaped by, and also in response to, global flows and processes.

## 2.6. Conclusions

Through a critical engagement with literature on and related to Atkinson's (2008) concept of the "democratisation of memory" I have raised a number of questions and presented a number of areas requiring further research. In section 2.1 I discussed the "democratisation of memory" as defined by Atkinson (2008) alongside a body of literature which describes and analyses processes similar to, and occurring in parallel to, the "democratisation of memory". All of this literature is "Western-centric"; it describes and analyses the occurrence of the "democratisation of memory", and of parallel processes, in the UK or in "the West" more broadly. The occurrence and nature of the "democratisation of memory" outside of the "Western" context remains an area requiring further research.

The post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe provide a valuable opportunity for research into the "democratisation of memory". Conditions of post-socialist transformation - the processes of democratisation, social and economic liberalisation and marketization as well as the opening up to global flows of ideas, money and people - would appear to favour the development of the kind of "democratisation of memory" which Atkinson (2008) observed in the UK. But has it? Or have different contexts produced different variants of the process? Even though the post-socialist countries of CEE provide a potentially rich seem of opportunity for the development of a deeper understanding of the "democratisation of memory" little research into the process has been carried out in CEE, and none has been carried out in Albania.

As well as studying the occurrence and nature of the "democratisation of memory" in post-socialist era Albania I have aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between the "democratisation of memory" and the (re)construction of national identity. In section 2.3 I discussed a range of theories and perspectives on this relationship revealing a lack of consensus on the matter. Some consider the "democratisation of memory" likely to fragment and undermine national identities while others consider it likely to make national identities stronger and more open and inclusive. Clearly it is an area where further research is required. In my research and analysis I address the following questions. How, if at all, has the "democratisation of memory" changed the way national identity is (re)constructed in post-socialist era Albania? Is the "democratisation of memory" fragmenting or strengthening national identity in that particular context? What can be learned from the Albanian context

about the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identities more generally?

In the discussion - in section 2.3 - of the “democratisation of memory” in post-socialist CEE I relate the “democratisation of memory” to the proliferation of “illiberal democracies” in the region. Drawing on reports of changes in the way some important museums in Hungary, Estonia and Poland are representing and interpreting their collections, and on reports of the popularity of these changes, I suggest that a particularly “illiberal” kind of “democratisation of memory” can be identified in parts of CEE. This is quite different to the liberal kind of “democratisation of memory” described by Atkinson (2008). This illiberal kind of “democratisation of memory” and its consequences, especially regarding the (re)construction of national identities is an area requiring further research. I aim to identify if any occurrence of the “democratisation of memory” in Albania is of the liberal kind described by Atkinson (2008) in the “Western” context or of the illiberal kind in evidence elsewhere in CEE.

I also discuss, in section 2.3, the tension between “official” negative representations of state-socialism and more nuanced or nostalgic “counter-memories” as identified by Young and Light (2015) as the “democratisation of memory” is a process through which “counter-memories” (Legg, 2005; Light and Young, 2015) of this kind can be represented and reproduced. Analysis of the representation of state-socialism and of heritage from the state-socialist era at “official” state-funded museums and heritage sites and at “un-official” private and NGO funded museums is a key aspect of my research through which I aim to develop deeper understanding of the ways in which the “democratisation of memory” is changing the politics of memory in Albania and more widely. I state my aims and objectives below in section 2.7. Before proceeding to the methodology chapter (chapter 3) I will state the aims and objectives of this thesis in section 2.7.

## **2.7. Aims and Objectives**

My research aims are;

- 4) To critically evaluate the concept of the “democratisation of memory” in the post-socialist context.
- 5) To analyse the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity in the context of post-socialist Albania;
- 6) To explore the “democratisation of memory” by analysing changing practices of the (re)construction and consumption of three selected “myths” of Albanian national identity at heritage sites and museums in the Communist and post-socialist periods

My research Objectives are;

- 1) To explore the “democratisation of memory” in relation to national identity by analysing the representation of three selected “myths” of Albanian national identity at heritage sites and museums;
- 2) To research how these myths have been shaped and reshaped in the discourses of key actors involved in shaping heritage;
- 3) To evaluate the usefulness of the concept of the ‘democratisation of memory’ in explaining memory and the construction of national identity in other contexts.

### **3.0 Methodology**

This chapter outlines and evaluates the methodology employed the research process. I begin with a discussion of my research philosophy, the poststructuralist perspective and approach which I have adopted during the research process, is described and discussed. After that my choices of research methodology – the research methods of textual analysis, semi-structured interviews and auto-ethnographic “thick” description – are explained and discussed. Then the method of data analysis – the coding and sorting of data - is briefly described and discussed. Finally some issues encountered and/or mitigated against while carrying out research in Albania are discussed.

Tables have been used to convey information about the research process. Table 3.1 lists the museums and heritage sites visited during the pilot phase of the research process, the stage at which key research sites were selected, and indicates the sites at which pilot interviews were carried out and the sites which were selected for further, more in depth, study. Table 3.2 lists the key codes used during the process of analysis and the myths of Albanian national identity to which they relate. Table 3.3 list the museums and heritage sites selected as key study sites and the reasons for their selection. And lastly, table 3.4 lists key interviewees, their roles/positions, the locations at which interviews took place and the total duration of recorded interviews.

### 3.1. Research Philosophy

The theoretical approach and perspective I took while carrying out research and analysis for this thesis was one of post-structuralism. It is an approach which treats discourse and representation as being relational. As Peet (1998: 195) observes, from the post-structural perspective representations of “truth”, of how things are, “at best describe perspectives from the views of particular thinkers”. Furthermore, Peet (1998: 195) adds, discourse and representation is often related to power and to “social control”, and the post-structural approach to research involves the identification of these relationships of power and control. Similarly Aitken (2005) notes that the post-structural approach involves the identification and analysis of the politics behind discourse and representation. This has been at the core of my research; the identification of patterns and processes of change in the representation of key myths of Albanian national identity and the relation of those patterns and processes to power and politics at the local, national and international scale.

In order to achieve this I have employed the poststructuralist method of discourse analysis. Discourse is defined by Gregory *et al* (2009: 166) as:

“A specific series of representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more possible”.

As Blunt *et al* (2003:11) observe:

“...discourse [] is a matter of power not simply truth. Since discourses define the ways things are understood, even whether things can be understood to exist or not, then part of any struggle for power is a struggle over language and knowledge, over discourse”.

In a similar vein Robinson (1998: 472) states:

“Discourses are embedded in day-to-day life where they help to promote particular views of the world, but in which knowledge tends to be associated with particular constructions and power relations which, ultimately, are contestable”.

Discourse analysis involves the analysis not just of what is said or represented by *why* it is said or represented and *by whom* (Wait, 2016). It involves, as Wait (2016: 288) puts it, “asking

questions about the ways in which distinct social “realities” or categories become normative ways to think/be/do”. During the writing of this thesis it has involved researching and analysing the ways in which selected myths of Albanian national identity have been constructed, by whom and for what purposes, and also why they have on occasion been challenged critiqued and deconstructed, by whom and for what purpose.

Post-structural analysis does not involve a search for absolute “truth” or for grand unifying theories. As Peet (1998: 215) points out:

“For most post-structural theorists representational theories of truth are both impossible, in terms of the available guarantees of accuracy, and inadequate, in that even accurate description only begins to approach the nebulous realm of truth”

This being so, adds Peet (1998: 215), theoretical contributions generated by post-structural research tend to be “declarative” and “systematic in a fragmentary way rather than rather than totalizing”. This does not mean that the post-structural approach is not useful or that no contribution to knowledge can be made. It is just that *total* knowledge, and *absolute* truth, are recognised as being unobtainable. Poststructuralist methodologies are, in fact, extremely useful for research into those areas where more empirical methodologies cannot be usefully applied. Post-structural methodologies such as discourse analysis can illuminate different and contrasting views and opinions as well as the relationships between them. It can reveal the power and artifice behind discourse and representation and/or it can reveal the emotional and ontological value of discourse and representation, of what is experienced and valued and believed in.

A methodological approach taken during the earlier stages of this research project was that of grounded theory, an approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). As Glaser and Strauss (1967: 273) explain, this is a methodological approach through which “theory evolves during actual research”, doing so through “continuous interplay of between analysis and data collection”. It is an approach to research that is data led rather than theory or hypothesis led. As Charmaz (2008: 155) puts it, this approach “begins with the empirical world and builds an inductive understanding of it as events unfold and knowledge accrues”. Stern (1980: 20) suggests that “the strongest case for the use of grounded theory is in investigations of



relatively uncharted waters". This, then, was a suitable methodological approach for the early pilot stage of the research process; a stage at which research was exploratory in nature and during which trends and patterns of change were being identified (Robinson, 1998).

### **3.2. Choice of Approach/Methods**

Taking the poststructuralist approach described above I have used qualitative methodologies to investigate and analyse discourse on the selected myths of Albanian national identity. As Winchester and Rofo (2016: 5) explain, qualitative methods are useful for investigating “social structures” and for “elucidating human environments and human experiences”. They are, therefore, methods suited to research into the construction and reconstruction of myths of national identity by both “elites” and “publics”. The methods I have used can broadly be categorised a discourse analysis, but more specifically I have carried out textual analysis, semi-structured interviews and “thick” auto-ethnographic description. I will discuss these in turn below.

In order to explore and analyse the construction of the selected myths of Albanian national identity I carried out textual analysis of on-site interpretive materials encountered at selected heritage sites and museums in Albania, including information boards, labels, guide books and the scripts/performances of tour guides (the latter having been recorded on a recording device where permitted). According to Aitken (2005: 235), the task of textual analysis is “to look for text like structures and connections, to appraise grammars, syntaxes, inter-texts and sub-texts, and to elaborate the relations between authors, texts and readers”. Through doing so I have sought to uncover the politics, geopolitics and power relations “hidden” behind the representations of history and heritage at these sites. I have also endeavoured to explore and understand the value, meaning and usefulness of narratives and myths of the nation, their embeddedness in people’s lives and their role in providing ontological security.

Aitken (2005) notes that those taking a post-structural approach to their research pay particular attention to milieu in which their research takes place. He writes that they

“...draw explicit attention to the context within which they are working, noting its contradictions, complications and complexities as insightful rather than obfuscating aspects of their positioning as readers, researchers and writers”  
(Aitken, 2005: 248)

Indeed it is only in the wider context - of politics, of geopolitics and of everyday life - that narratives, myths and memories of national identity can be properly understood. For this

reason, throughout my analysis I will refer to the broader context in which museums and heritage sites exist.

While textual analysis of the interpretive materials encountered at selected museums and heritage sites was a key element of my research, in depth semi-structured and unstructured interviews were also required in order to gain insight into the processes through which narrative content was constructed. In some instances interviews allowed an exploration of the structures and processes of power and influence behind the construction of the narrative content of particular museums and heritage sites. In other instances, particularly when I was carrying out research at private collections/museums, it was the meanings and uses of the things collected and the memories they elicited which was of interest rather than structures or processes of power and influence. Graham (2005) notes that in depth qualitative interviews are appropriate for research into the meanings of places and things, and similarly Kitchin and Tate (2000: 213) note that they allow a “thorough examination of experiences, feelings and opinions”. This approach allows the flexibility to explore issues and areas as they arise and to gain new and unexpected insights (Blunt *et al*, 2003; Charmaz, 2008). In depth unstructured interviews can be less leading and/or constraining than more structured approaches. As Valentine (2005: 110) points out, it is an approach which can allow “interviewees to construct their own accounts of their experiences by describing and explaining their lives in their own words”. Furthermore, adds Valentine (2005: 111) it is a method which “allows respondents to raise issues which the interviewer may not have anticipated”.

A third method used during the research process is the recording of auto-ethnographic accounts of “thick description”. Robinson (1998: 421) describes this as being “rich in detail, observation and opinion” while Kitchin and Tate (2000: 233) note that it “includes information concerning the situational context ... intentions and meanings ... and the process in which the situation is embedded”. An important aspect of this auto-ethnographic method is the situating of the researcher in the research process. This can be valuable for two reasons. Firstly, where the moment being described involves interaction it would be misleading to ignore the fact that the researcher is part of what is being described. This relates to the adoption of a poststructuralist perspective and methodology, and the recognition and acknowledgement of the fact that the researcher is not – and cannot be -

remote from or unconnected to that which is being researched (Aitken, 2005). Secondly, the experiences and impressions of the researcher can, in and of themselves, be of value and worthy of analysis. Museums and heritage sites do not just inform, they also elicit an emotional response. Such things as the layout, décor and ambience, the mannerisms of tour guides even the behaviour of other visitors, can affect the way a place is experienced and the way a narrative is conveyed (Ostow, 2008). Such details are not ignored as they are important facets of discourse.

### **3.3. Data Collection**

I will describe my data collection procedures below in terms of two phases, the pilot phase and the main data gathering phase. I will begin with the pilot phase. The pilot phase of my research involved two key tasks. The first of these was the identification of key narratives regarding the three selected myths of Albanian national identity at museums and heritage sites in Albania and the second key task was the selection of key sites at which, and about which, to carry out more in depth research. In order to achieve both of these goals I visited museums and heritage sites across Albania, recording narrative content and, where possible, carrying out pilot interviews. The sites visited are listed in table 3.1, along with indications of pilot interviews carried out and selection for further study. A third task, that of ascertaining public opinion of the selected myths of Albanian national identity through interviews with members of the general public was trialled during the pilot phase but then discontinued when I decided to concentrate my efforts on interviewing the producers of myth and memory. I will discuss this further in section 3.5.

The key narratives of Albanian national identity were identified through extensive note taking, cross referencing of notes and coding. This process is described in section 3.5. The codes identified, minus those which were trialled and abandoned, are listed in table 3.2. Once identified these codes, and the patterns and trends they revealed, guided the direction of further research including the selection of key sites and the questions asked during interviews. It was following the initial pilot stage that my research moved from being based on the data-led grounded theory approach to a more tightly focused approach; focused, that is, on exploring the key patterns and trends identified and on doing so at selected key sites through further textual analysis and in-depth interviews.

Before moving on to discuss the main data gathering phase I want to give further explanation of the process of site selection. There were three key criteria for the selection of sites for further in-depth study. The first was related to narrative content, the second to funding/ownership of the site, and the third was related to the willingness of curators, guides or collectors to be interviewed in depth. I will discuss these in turn. Regarding narrative content, the sites could be selected for richness of narrative content, for typicality of content (for example a typical example of “official” discourse) or for unusual or atypical content. The second criteria – the funding/ownership of the site – was important as it related to the

**Table 3.1. Sites visited during pilot phase of research. Indications of pilot interviews and selection of site for further study.**

<b>Name/location of site visited</b>	<b>Pilot interview carried out</b>	<b>Selection for further study</b>
National Historical Museum, Tirana	Yes	Yes
Archaeological Museum, Tirana	Yes	Yes
Skanderbeg Museum, Kruja	Yes	Yes
History Museum, Shkodër	Yes	Yes
Rozafa Castle Museum	No	No
Selca e Poshtme Illyrian Tombs	No	No
Kamenica Tumulus	No	Yes
Gjirokastër Museum	Yes	Yes
Gjirokastër Bunker	Yes	No
Antigonia Archaeological Park	No	No
Butrint Archaeological Park	Yes	Yes
Apollonia Archaeological Park	Yes	No
Byllis Archaeological Park	No	No
Vlora History Museum, Vlora	Yes	No
Durrës Archaeological Museum	No	No
Skanderbeg's Grave, Lezhë	No	No
Tirana Pyramid, Tirana		
Elton Caushi's Collection, Tirana	Yes	Yes
Krisaq Kullufe's Collection, Permet	Yes	Yes
Permet Congress Museum	Yes	No
Peze Congress Museum, Peze	Yes	No
Elbasan History Museum, Elbasan	No	No

power/politics behind particular representations and narratives. Three categories – state-funded, “Western” NGO funded and privately owned – were selected for study. As will become apparent these correlated with particular kinds of discourse and particular narratives. Finally, the willingness of a curator or guide to be interviewed in depth was the main reason for the selection of two key sites – the Shkodër History Museum and the Pogradec Museum. These are both small provincial museums visited by relatively few people. I suspect that the staff at these museums were willing to be interviewed at length because they had plenty of time on their hands. The key sites, along with brief notes on the reasons for their selection, are listed in table 3.3.

I turn next to the main data gathering phase. This involved re-visiting the selected key sites and carrying out, where possible, more in depth interviews with curators/guides/collectors. It also involved carrying out desk-top research into the sites, including internet research, in order to build up background knowledge of the sites. This involved, for example, finding and reading the progress reports and newsletters of the Gjirokastër Foundation, an NGO. The main interviewees are listed in table 3.4 along with their role/position, the location where the interviews took place and the total duration of interviews recorded. Three of the interviewees are not directly related to any particular key site but were interviewed in order to gain insight into particular trends/narratives/issues. These are Professor Ilirjan Gjipali, Berjan Premto and a tour guide from the Tirana based Albanian Adventure tour-company (anonymised). Professor Gjipali was interviewed in order to gain insight into prevailing ideas and attitudes amongst archaeologists of his generation regarding the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity, that is the generation of archaeologists who lived and worked under Enver Hoxha’s regime, as well as insight into archaeology and museology during the state-socialist era. Gjërgj Erebara is a journalist who had reported on the campaign to save the Tirana Pyramid and who had been present at the protests. I interviewed him about that campaign and also about the Pavilion of Communist Terror in the National Historical Museum as he had visited the newly re-opened display and had strong opinions about it. The guide from Albanian Adventure was interviewed during a walking tour of communist era heritage sites in Tirana and requested anonymity due to having expressed potentially controversial views about that era (the anonymization of particular interviewees is discussed further in section 3.5). A total of 24 hours and 42 minutes of interviews were

recorded during three field trips. The first field trip took place over four weeks in June/July 2013. The second took place over 5 weeks in June/July 2014. And the third and final field trip took place over two weeks in April/May 2015. In the next section, section 3.4, I turn to the analysis of data collected through sites visits and interviews.



**Table 3.2. Key codes used during analysis**

Selected Myth of Albanian National Identity	Codes use during analysis
Myth of Illyrian-Albanian Continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Confirmation/defence of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity</li> <li>- Representation of Illyrian presence in “Greater Albania”</li> <li>- Myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity/autochthony linked with geopolitics</li> <li>- Representation of ancient Epirotes as Illyrian</li> <li>- Representation of ancient Epirotes as neither Illyrian nor Greek</li> <li>- “Universalist” representation of place/identity at museums/archaeological sites</li> <li>- Refutation of myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity</li> </ul>
Myth of Skanderbeg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continuity of state-socialist/post-socialist representations of Skanderbeg</li> <li>- Changes in state-socialist/post-socialist representations of Skanderbeg</li> <li>- Skanderbeg as symbol of Albania’s European identity</li> <li>- Skanderbeg and religion</li> <li>- Skanderbeg and “Greater Albania”</li> </ul>
Myth and Memory of Enver Hoxha and State-Socialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Official” representations of state-socialism/Hoxha</li> <li>- NGO funded representations of state-socialism</li> <li>- Private “unofficial” representations of state-socialism</li> <li>- Linking of Sali Berisha/Democratic Party with “anti-communism”</li> <li>- Linking of Socialist party with “crypto-communism”</li> <li>- Representation of everyday life during state-socialist era</li> <li>- Representation of state-socialist era industrial heritage/products</li> <li>- Positive/nostalgic representation of state-socialism</li> <li>- State-socialism and civic pride</li> <li>- State-socialism and continuity</li> </ul>

**Table 3.3. Key Research Sites and Reasons for their Selection**

Name/Location of Site	Myths/Memories of Albanian Identity Represented	State Funded, NGO Funded or Private	Reasons for Selection
National Historical Museum, Tirana	Myth of Illyrian-Albanian Continuity and Memory of State-Socialism	State Funded	The National Museum – key representation of “official” discourse
Archaeological Museum, Tirana	Myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity	State Funded	Key example of “official” discourse
Skanderbeg Museum	Myth of Skanderbeg	State Funded	Key example of “official” discourse
Pogradec Museum, Pogradec	Myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity, Memory of State Socialism	State Funded	Curator allowed in-depth interview. Representation of “counter-memory” of state-socialism
Shkodër History Museum, Shkodër	Myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity	State Funded	Curator allowed in-depth interview.
Butrint Archaeological Park	Myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity (dis-embedded)	“Western” NGO Funded	Key NGO funded site. Demonstrates “dis-embedding” by NGO
Gjirokastër Museum	Myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity (dis-embedded). Memory of state-socialism	“Western” NGO Funded	Demonstrates “dis-embedding” by NGO. Representation of “counter-memory” of state-socialism
Elton Caushi’s Collection, Tirana	Memory of State-Socialism	Private collection	Representation of “counter-memory” of state-socialism
Kristaq Kullufe’s Collection, Permet	Memory of State-Socialism	Private collection	Representation of “counter-memory” of state-socialism

**Table 3.4. Key interviewees/interviews**

<b>Name of interviewee</b>	<b>Role/position of interviewee</b>	<b>Location at which interview/s carries out</b>	<b>Duration of recorded interview/s</b>
Elton Caushi	Tour guide/collector of state-socialist heritage	Tirana and Peza	4 hours 18 minutes
Anonymised	Guide from Albanian Adventure	Tirana	3 hours 20 minutes
Edvin Lamce	Project coordinator, Gjirokastër Foundation	Gjirokastër and Tirana	2 hours 37 minutes
Sadi Petrela	Project Manager, Gjirokastër Foundation	Gjirokastër	1 hour 54 minutes
Anonymised	Curator, Pogradec Museum	Pogradec	1 hour 47 minutes
Anonymised	Museum guide, Shkodër History Museum	Shkodër	42 minutes
Gjergj Erebara	Journalist. Reported on Tirana Pyramid	Tirana	40 minutes
Professor Ilirjan Gjipali	Archaeologist and lecturer at Tirana University	Tirana	40 minutes
Berjan Premto	Director of Culture, Permet district	Permet	35 minutes
Sali Kadria	Department curator and guide, National Historical Museum	Tirana	25 minutes
Kristaq Kullufe	Private collector of state-socialist heritage	Permet	25 minutes
Professor David Hernandez	Archaeologist and Project supervisor, Butrint	Saranda	15 minutes
Fioralba Duma	Organiser of campaign to save the Tirana Pyramid	Online	N/A

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

In this section I discuss the process of data analysis. Although I have placed this section after the section about data collection I do not want to give the impression that the processes occurred one after the other. Analysis was a process which took place throughout the research process, during the pilot phase, during the main data collection phase and after data collection was completed. Coding carried out during the pilot phase informed site selection, questions asked during interviews and the direction of subsequent research. Analysis was constantly revised as more data was gathered and, in a cyclical process, analysis guided subsequent data gathering, and in particular influenced which questions were asked at follow-up interviews. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) point out, “analysis is a very dynamic process”, one which is “never quite finished” as the researcher is “always thinking about their data ... always extending, amending, and reinterpreting interpretations as insights arise and situations change” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 50).

The system of coding I used was one which utilised Microsoft Word for Windows. In a variant of the method of “cutting and pasting” described by Crang (2005: 222) I copied and pasted quotes and/or notes from transcripts of interviews and from typed-up research notebooks into new documents in which they were ordered by codes. A single note or quote could be put into more than one coded group. These codes were sorted according to narrative and also according to the nature or type of site at which the data was gathered – whether the museum or heritage site at which the data was gathered was state-funded, NGO funded or privately funded, for example. An important aspect of analysis was also one of connection (Crang, 2005). A cross referencing of these coded pools of data made correlations between the funding/ownership of museums and heritage sites and narrative content apparent. This relationship between funding/ownership of museums and heritage sites has been one of the key areas of research. The key codes used during analysis are listed above in table 3.3. I turn next to particular issues encountered and/or mitigated against during my field trip to Albania.

### **3.5. Issues Encountered During Data Collection and Evaluation**

I want to begin this account of issues encountered and/or mitigated for whilst carrying out research in Albania with a brief discussion of positionality. As discussed above, an aspect of the poststructuralist approach to research is the awareness of the relationship between the researcher and the subject of research. As Dowling (2016: 39) points out:

“Although you cannot be entirely independent from the object of your research, trying to become aware of the nature of your involvement and the influence of social relations is a useful beginning that can help you identify implications of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity in your work”.

It is this awareness of the relationship between self as researcher and the subject/s of research, and the reflexive maintenance of that awareness, which is known as positionality.

Positionality is particularly important when carrying out interviews. Flowerdew and Martin (2005:113) remind those whose research involves interviewing that it is “important to reflect on who you are and how your own identity will shape the interactions that you will have with others”, adding “In particular, it is important to recognise the different power relations between yourself and your informants”. This is of special importance in contexts such as Albania where many people are, by “Western” standards, economically disadvantaged. As Valentine (2006: 24) points out, “interviewing in different cultural contexts, particularly in less developed countries, requires heightened sensitivity to the complex power relations which exist between researchers and interviewees”.

Dowling (2016: 37) states that “you cannot eliminate the power dimension from your research” and that “The best strategy is to be aware of, understand, and respond to it in a critically reflexive manner” (ibid). On a practical level Valentine (2005: 125) advise that it is vital “to make it clear to interviewees that they do not have to answer everything which they are asked and that they can terminate an interview at any time”. At times the power relations between myself as interviewer and particular interviewees raised such questions of ethics. For example when interviewing Krisaq Kullufe, a retired plumber on a meagre state-pension who has created a small museum of state-socialist heritage, I was aware that as I had paid him a small admission fee he may feel unable to refuse to answer questions or to be recorded. In this situation it was particularly important to make it entirely clear that he was under no

obligation to do anything he was not comfortable with, that he could refuse to answer questions and that he could end the interview at any time. Consent forms signed by interviewees prior to interviews made it clear to interviewees that they were under no obligation to answer any questions they did not wish to answer and that they could end the interview at any time.

In some instances it was not so much the power relations between myself and the interviewee as the power relations between the interviewee and others which was the issue. This was particularly important to keep in mind when discussing memory and heritage of the state-socialist era. As Tarifa (1994) and Tarifa and Weinstein (1995) point out, when the Democratic Party was in government tens of thousands of Albanians lost their jobs and livelihoods as a result of politically motivated lustration campaigns- not because they held positions of power and privilege in the state-socialist regime but because of their support for the Socialist Party opposition. In this political climate views expressed about the state-socialist past can potentially result in lost career opportunities or even terminated employment, and for this reason some individuals employed in state institutions declined to share their views or requested anonymity. It was always made clear to interviewees that any request for anonymity would be respected and also that they were under no pressure or obligation to share their opinions and that they were free to retract what they had said at any time. Consent forms signed by interviewees before interviews commenced stated that interviewees could request anonymity before, during or after the interview and that any request for anonymity would be honoured. One key site selected for further study, a museum of the historical Peza Conference maintained by a family in the village of Peza was dropped as a key site after the site and the family – one of whom is a politician – were represented in a politically motivated media campaign as being “crypto-communist”. In this climate they no longer felt comfortable with the research process and cancelled planned interviews.

When interviewing those who had experienced life under state-socialist rule, and particularly when discussing memory of that era, it was important to be aware of the fact that the recollection of some memories of state-socialism might, for a variety of reasons, be traumatic and difficult to discuss. Again, it was always made clear to interviewees that they were under no obligation to discuss anything they preferred not to talk about. It was also important to be aware of the fact that some individuals who had lived through the state-

socialist era might be made uncomfortable by the experience of being questioned, and particularly by being recorded, as this experience might remind them of state surveillance. That some older people who have lived through Albania's state-socialist era can become distressed by the experience of being interviewed is noted by Bon (2008) in her auto-ethnographic account of carrying out research in the village of Dhermi in south-west Albania. For this reason, as well as for the other reasons stated above, interviewees were always asked if they were comfortable with being recorded before I switched on the recording device. No interviewees objected to being recorded, though one museum guide in the Skanderbeg Museum requested that I not record the guided tour of that museum. In this instance, and with the guide's permission, I took notes using pen and notebook during the tour instead.

Another factor effecting the research process was that of language. Although I learned some basic Albanian during the research process I did not attain a level of proficiency high enough to make interviewing in Albanian satisfactory. I therefore carried out interviews in English or, if this was not possible, used a translator. Only one interview referred to in the main body of this thesis was carried out with the aid of an interpreter. This was the interview with Kristaq Kullufe which was carried out in Permet with a trainee tour guide, Kosta Nace, as translator. The use of a translator brings forth issues. The researcher cannot be entirely sure if the translator is putting across exactly what either the interviewer or the interviewee is saying.

In section 3.3. I stated that, during the pilot phase of field research I began the task of ascertaining public opinions about selected myths of Albanian national identity through interviews with members of the general public but then discontinued this task and decided to concentrate my efforts on interviewing the producers of myth and memory. A survey of public opinions on the selected myths of Albanian national identity would likely have provided valuable insight into the democratisation of memory. The reasons it was abandoned during the pilot phase were reasons of practicality. One of the reasons involves the issue of language. In order to carry out a representative survey of opinion I would have had to interview a significant number of non-English-speaking individuals and paying a translator to assist in this task would have been beyond my means. Even had language not been an issue, however, it is unlikely that a meaningful survey of public opinions about the selected myths of Albanian national identity would have been achievable for a lone researcher. An attempted survey of

public opinion about the Tirana Pyramid carried out in Tirana during the pilot phase of field research proved time consuming due to a low rate of response and due to the difficulty of ensuring a truly representative sample of the population. In order to carry out a meaningful and representative survey of opinion it would have been necessary to survey opinion in rural as well as urban areas, a full spectrum of age ranges, a full spectrum of socio-economic strata, minority groups such as Roma and the Greek and Macedonian minorities who live in south and eastern Albania as well as in Tirana, and furthermore a balance of genders within these groupings. As time spent in Albania was limited by financial considerations it became clear that a more focused and efficient research strategy was required. I therefore decided to focus on interviewing the producers of myth and memory.



### **3.6. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed my research philosophy, the perspective and approach of poststructuralism. I have described and discussed my research methodologies; textual analysis of the interpretive materials provided at the selected museums and heritage sites and the scripts of tour guides; in-depth semi-structured interviews; and auto-ethnographic “thick” descriptions of site visits. I have briefly described the process of analysis, the use of coding to identify key narratives and relationships between those narratives. And finally I have discussed issues encountered and/or mitigated against while carrying out research in Albania.

In the next three chapters, chapters 4, 5, and 6, I describe, discuss and analyse my findings. These chapters address each of the three selected myths of Albanian national identity in turn. In chapter 4 I explore and analyse my findings relating to the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity, in chapter 5 I explore and analyse my findings relating to the myth of Skanderbeg and in chapter 6 I explore and analyse my findings in relation to myths and memories of Enver Hoxha and the era of state-socialism.

#### **4.0. The “Myth” of Illyrian-Albanian Continuity: Introduction**

In this chapter I explore the occurrence and nature of the “democratisation of memory” and the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity through an analysis of representations of the “theory” or “myth” of Illyrian-Albanian continuity. The “theory” or “myth” of Illyrian-Albanian continuity is the “myth of origin” of the Albanian nation; a myth which describes the Albanian people as the direct descendants of the ancient Illyrians who dwelled in the south-western Balkans in antiquity. The myth has it that the Albanian people are autochthonous to most of those parts of the Western Balkans inhabited by Albanian people today and in the recent past; not only to most of present day Albania but also to Kosovo and parts of Macedonia and Montenegro. Furthermore if, as many Albanian archaeologists and historians have claimed, the ancient Epirotes were in fact ethnically Illyrian it follows that Albanians are also autochthonous to southern Albania and part of north-western Greece. If on the other hand, as many Greek archaeologists and historians have claimed, the ancient Epirotes were ethnically Hellenic (and if one assumes there to be continuity between the ancient Hellenes and modern day Greeks) then the Greek people of today can be considered autochthonous not only to northern Greece but also to southern Albania. For this reason both the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and claims and counter claims about the ethnicity of the ancient Epirotes are geopolitically significant and controversial.

I have divided this chapter into two sections. Section 4.1 is a short historiography of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity from its nineteenth century origins to the end of the state-socialist era. This provides historical context which gives the myth its contemporary meaning and significance. Section 4.2, the main body of the chapter, focuses on the post-socialist era and addresses the key questions regarding the occurrence and nature of the “democratisation of memory” and the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity in Albania.

In section 4.2 I argue five key points. Firstly I argue that the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity has been enduringly popular in the post-socialist era and that, through being incorporated into popular culture and embedded into everyday life, it has become ever more tightly woven into Albanian’s sense of national identity. Secondly I argue that the enduring

popularity of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity is in large part due to its contemporary geopolitical significance; that geopolitical tensions in the region give the claim to autochthony which the myth provides continued relevance. Thirdly I argue that state-funded museums and heritage sites have represented and reproduced popular myth – the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity – in preference to new and challenging conceptions of history and place. Fourthly I argue that, in a context of neo-liberal economic rationalisation and austerity, the intervention of “Western” NGOs at certain sites has resulted in the “dis-embedding” of heritage and memory at particular locales. And fifthly - the most important key point - I argue that although the “democratisation of memory” has occurred in post-socialist Albania it has not followed the pattern observed and described by Atkinson (2008) in the context of the UK where - according to Atkinson (2008: 383) - “official” discourse has come to be challenged and undermined by the emergence of “plural voices”. I argue that the type of “democratisation of memory” which has occurred in post-socialist Albania has not challenged and undermined “official” discourse on the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity but - quite the contrary - has actually bolstered the myth and allowed it to become an even more deeply embedded and popular facet of Albanian national identity.

#### 4.1. A Historiography of the Myth of Illyrian-Albanian Continuity: 1854-1991

The theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity was first put forward by the Austrian diplomat and historian Johann Georg von Hahn in 1854 in his book, the *Albenesische Studien* (Wilkes, 1992:5). Mr von Hahn was writing at a time when the Ottoman Empire was weakening and Austria-Hungarian elites were starting to take great interest in Albanian inhabited lands for geo-political reasons. In particular the elites of Austria-Hungary were growing increasingly concerned with the threat which Pan-Slavism and/or Serbian expansionism posed to their empire, and for this reason they were determined to prevent Serbia from annexing any of the strategically important ports on the Adriatic - particularly the Albanian port of Durrës – should the Ottoman Empire collapse (Vickers, 2011, Glenny, 2012, Judah, 2008, Guy, 2012). While I know of no evidence to suggest that von Hahn formulated his theory with the intention that it become an instrument of geopolitics, as a diplomat he seems likely to have been aware of its potential significance in geopolitical matters.

It is in the early twentieth century that the geopolitical significance of von Hahn's theory really becomes clear. The Ottoman Empire was, by this time, breaking apart and Albania's irredentist neighbours – Serbia, Greece and Montenegro - were intent on annexing the impoverished and poorly defended Albanian inhabited lands. It was only at this point that there emerged among Albanian elites a consensus in favour of national sovereignty (Vickers, 2011). As a motley band of Albanian intellectuals, wealthy landowners and tribal leaders gathered in the port of Vlora to proclaim independence the Great Powers were plotting to shape the Balkan region according to their own interests. As previously mentioned, Austria-Hungary's principle concern was to prevent Serbia from gaining a port on the Adriatic. Particularly frightening to Austria-Hungary was the possibility that a Serbian port could be used by Russia, Serbia's main backer and Austria-Hungary's main regional rival. It was for this reason that Austria-Hungary backed the establishment of an Albanian nation-state (Vickers, 2011, Malcolm, 1998).

It was in this geo-political context that a Croatian historian and politician named Milan von Sufflay wrote, in an article for the *Neue Freie Presse*, a Viennese newspaper, of the presence in Kosovo of "the granite monuments of a formerly great nation, the Illyrians" (von Sufflay, 1912). In this article von Sufflay goes on to present, as established scientific fact, the

myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and to argue that, as the autochthonous people of the region, the Albanians have a greater moral right to ownership of the region than the Slavic Serbs (von Sufflay, 1912). He states toward the end of his article:

“The purpose of these lines is to draw an objective picture of Albania in the Middle Ages (before the arrival of the Turks) so that it is obvious to everyone: 1) that the Serbs are not the only ones who could raise historical claims to Albania, 2) that there were moments in Albanian history that speak in favour of annexation and others that speak in favour of Albanian autonomy, 3) that Serb politicians would have done better not to mention a historical claim to the main Albanian port of Durrës that they intend to conquer.” (von Sufflay, 1912)

Albanian’s right to a nation-state was debated and then affirmed by the Great Powers at the Conference of Ambassadors in London in 1913. The Albanian elites and their Austro-Hungarian and Italian backers did not get all they had asked for at the Conference of Ambassadors, however. Kosovo was given to Serbia as a concession to Russia, despite the area’s largely Albanian speaking population, and the southern part of what was once Epirus was given to Greece according to the wishes of France and Britain (Mazower, 2000, Malcolm, 1998, Vickers, 2011).

Albania’s independence was, at this time, dependent upon the support of Austria-Hungary and the agreement of the other Great Powers. As such it was an example of what Herzfeld (2002: 900) calls “crypto-colonialism”. Herzfeld (2002: 900) defines “crypto-colonialism” as:

“...the curious alchemy whereby certain countries ... were compelled to acquire their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence, this relationship being articulated in the iconic guise of aggressively national culture fashioned to suit foreign models”.

One of the examples of “crypto-colonialism” discussed by Herzfeld (2002) is that of Greece. The “crypto-colonial” status of Greece, he argues, shaped that country’s national identity such that it reflected the philhellenism of Western Powers. He writes of:

“...the model of seamless continuity between modern and ancient Greece, as articulated in the crypto-colonialist and nationalist discourses” (Herzfeld, 2002: 919)

The parallel with the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity is clearly apparent. Both discourses reflect nineteenth and early twentieth century West-European conceptions of linear national continuity (Anderson, 1983).

After the First World War Albania's borders, and even its continued existence as a nation-state, were once again under discussion as the victorious Allied Powers gathered at the Paris Peace Conference to decide, amongst other matters, Albania's fate (Vickers, 2011, Malcolm, 1998). This time the ruling elite of the fledgling Albanian state had to make their own case for their country's existence. A memorandum sent by the Albanian government to the Allied Powers prior to the Paris Peace Conference referred to the Albanians' Illyrian heritage as part of the moral case for allowing the continued existence of the Albanian state:

“The Albanians, the most ancient race of Europe, have been there from time immemorial, long before the Greeks and the Slavs had come into the Balkan Peninsula. They are the direct descendants of the old Illyrians ... and their language is the only living specimen of the tongues spoken by the aboriginal Aryan settlers of South-Eastern Europe. They are a distinct race with distinct national characteristics, customs and traditions ...” (Noli *et al*, 1918)

It is unclear what influence, if any, the memorandum penned by Noli *et al* had on the outcome of the Paris Peace Conference. In January of 1920 the Allies agreed to divide Albania up between Yugoslavia, Greece and Italy. This was prevented, however, by the intervention of the American President Woodrow Wilson (Glenny, 2012). Thanks to the American President's actions Albania continued to exist with much the same borders as before the First World War.

While President Wilson had prevented the Albanian state from being dismembered entirely around half of all Albanian speaking people remained outside the borders of Albania. Those left outside of the Albanian state were periodically persecuted by the ethno-national majorities of the nation-states in which they found themselves. During the 1930s the regime of General Metaxas acted to remove Muslim Albanian speakers from Greek Epirus and to

forcibly assimilate Orthodox Christian Albanian speakers into using the Greek language and identifying themselves as Greek, and during and immediately after the Second World War the far-right-wing National Republican Greek League evicted and murdered many of those few Cham Albanians who remained (Vickers and Pettifer, 2014, Elsie and Destani, 2013). Albanians in Kosovo fared little better. Vickers (2011:127) notes that “Throughout the interwar period the Yugoslav government exerted pressure on the [Kosovar] Albanian population either to emigrate or to be assimilated” by such means as confiscating land without compensation and enforcing the use of the Serbian language in schools. Ever since the Conference of Ambassadors there have been some Albanians who have dreamed of expanding the borders of the Albanian state so as to incorporate Kosovo, southern Epirus and the Albanian inhabited parts of Macedonia and Montenegro, an area sometimes referred to as “Greater Albania”. The myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the claim of autochthony has been used to justify such ambitions.

While Albania had, in the end, been recognised by the Great Powers as a legitimate nation-state the Albanian elite still had to turn their country, as Mithat Frashëri - one of the more prominent Albanian nation-builders of the time - put it, “from a scattered array of clans into a nation” (Frashëri quoted in Lubonja, 2002:91). The British journalist and ethnographer Edith Durham, who travelled in northern Albania a few years before the country had gained independence, wrote of these north Albanian tribes; “Each tribe has a definite tale of origin” (Durham, 1909:20). These various myths of origin often told of movement rather than rootedness; for example “Shala, Shoshi and Mirdita” Durham writes, were believed to, “descend from three brothers, who came from Rashia to escape Turkish oppression” (Durham, 1909:84). There was no mention in those tribal myths recorded by Durham of the Illyrians or of any common ancestry of all the tribes or of all Albanians. Durham (1909) found people in those remote highland villages who identified first and foremost with the tribe or clan and who had little sense of national identity or apparent desire for a national state.

Though the development of a widely held sense of national identity was a priority of the Albanian elite progress in that direction was slow. The first few decades of Albanian independence were chaotic with frequent changes of government, none of which were strong enough, or long lasting enough, to make significant progress toward developing further a sense of national cohesion and unity (Vickers, 2011). It was only in December 1924, when

Ahmet Zogu - later King Zog - took control of the Albanian government by military coup that a fifteen year period of relative stability allowed state directed nation building to begin to make more significant progress, and even this was severely limited by a lack of funds. Though Zogu had been assisted into power by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia – in return for helping to quell a Kosovar Albanian resistance movement - he soon changed allegiances and turned to Italy for financial assistance. Benito Mussolini's fascist regime, which had ambitions to establish a new Roman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean region, was eager to oblige (Vickers, 2011, Glenny, 2012).

During the inter-war period Italy, with the tacit approval of the other European Powers, turned Albania into a dependency and a puppet state. It was an example of Herzfeld's (2002) "crypto-colonialism" which became less cryptic and more overtly colonialist with each passing year. As this process of annexation was going on historians and archaeologists from Italy and Germany constructed narratives of Albanian and Illyrian inferiority which served to normalise and justify Italy's occupation of Albania. For example, German historian Georg Stadtmüller claimed that Illyrian inferiority to the Romans could be evidenced by the Albanian language - by the "fact" that words concerning urban "civilised" life were rooted in Latin and words concerning rural "uncivilised" life had Illyrian origins (Stadtmüller, 1936). To illustrate his thinking and manner of discourse I quote one of his observations:

"The word for 'beehive' is Latin, but the terms for 'bee', 'honey', and 'wax' are purely Albanian. As such, one can surmise that the early Albanians knew about wild bees before they had contact with the Romans, but they learned of bee-keeping from the Romans" (Stadtmüller, 1936)

The Italians themselves carried out research which served to normalise and justify the occupation of Albania. The Italian Archaeological Mission to Albania, a branch of the Italian Foreign Ministry, was established in 1924 under the supervision of Roberto Paribeni, an Italian archaeologist and director of the National Roman Museum (Gilkes, 2002:1, Francis, 2001:1). Paribeni proposed the excavation of some Illyrian tombs in order to, as he put it in correspondence, "satisfy up to a point the fanatical and puerile national pride of the Albanians" and "their desire to be able to know and illuminate their ancestors the Illyrians" (Paribeni 1924 quoted in Gilkes, 2004:44). This was an indulgence which was proposed,



according to Francis (2001:2), “in order to exploit these sentiments for political ends”. Paribeni put Luigi Ulgolini, a young but talented Archaeologist, in charge of the Archaeological Mission in Albania. In 1927 Zog’s government granted Ulgolini a 30 year permit to study some Iron Age burial sites in southern Albania on condition that they would shed light on the ancient Illyrians (Francis, 2001:2). Just a year later, however, the Italians turned their attention to another site, an ancient settlement on the Adriatic coast called Butrint. The move to Butrint was indicative of the Italians’ increasing assertiveness and of the Albanian government’s disempowerment. The excavation of Butrint was not being carried out in order to illuminate Albania’s Illyrian heritage. The Italians were at Butrint to illuminate a founding myth of their own.

Butrint was, Ulgolini believed, the ancient port of Buthrotum which Aeneas, hero of Virgil’s Aeneid, had visited *en route* to Italy (Hodges, 2000:2). The Aeneid was the foundation myth of Rome, a myth which Mussolini’s regime was keen to promote. At this time, the Butrint Foundation website notes, “Rome’s [] Trojan past was increasingly being promoted in Italy as a symbol of identity and as corroboration for political policy” (Butrint Foundation, 2012: online). Ulgolini, notes Hodges (2000: 2), “excavated on a great scale, determined to prove to Mussolini that Butrint was a worthy stopping-point in Aeneas’ wanderings before he founded Rome”. One of the main objectives of Ulgolini’s team was the discovery of the Scaean Gate which is described in Virgil’s epic and, indeed, a gate was found, much to the excitement of the governing elite in Rome. An Italian postage stamp issued in 1930-31 depicted Aeneas at these gates, thus raising popular awareness of both the myth of Aeneas and the “rediscovery” of the Scaean Gate (Gilkes, 2004: 50). At around the same time a tourist cruise, the “*Crociera Virgiliana*”, which re-traced Aeneas’ legendary journey stopped off at Butrint (Gilkes, 2004: 50, Butrint.org, 2013). The Italian regime, through such means, began to construct “imagined geographies” which situated Roman-Italian heritage on Albanian soil, presented Roman occupation as having brought civilisation to a barbarian people, and paved the way for the annexation of Albania. In April 1939, in response to an attempt by King Zog to re-assert Albanian (and/or royal) sovereignty, Mussolini’s regime abandoned any pretence of respecting Albania’s independence and occupied the country (Vickers, 2011).

It is constructivist theories of “top-down” elite led nation building which seem to be most applicable to analysis of the period of the formation of Albanian national identity

discussed above. What is striking, though, is the extent to which it is the elites of the Great Powers who shaped the Albanian nation-state both in terms of borders and the less tangible but equally profound areas of myth, memory and identity. Albanian elites were certainly engaged in the project of constructing an Albanian national identity but, due to the geo-political context of the time, a context in which that nation building project was always dependent upon the support of a larger more powerful state, those elites were always heavily influenced by and beholden to their Great Power sponsors. Both the Albanian nation-state and the “myths”, “memories” and narratives which were constructed in order to bolster it were, therefore, shaped in part by the elites of European Great Powers. They are in part a legacy of the “crypto-colonialism” identified by Herzfeld (2002).

Decades after the Italians had been driven from Albania during the Second World War the state-socialist regime of Enver Hoxha would refer back to the “colonialist archaeology” of “imperialist powers” in general and the Italians in particular. A government document dating from the state-socialist era states:

“Under ex-King Zog’s regime over a period of 10 years, foreign archaeological expeditions were motivated more by political interests than scientific considerations. Italian archaeologists were only interested in the ancient Roman monuments on Illyrian soil to prove the magnificence of Rome. They did not even hesitate from stealing valuable finds for Italian museums, and in their “scientific” essays, they attempted to give their version of the origin of Albanian culture. They tried to convince the scientific circles that, regardless of invaluable treasures of an ancient civilisation, that culture had been imported from abroad. Mussolini’s official propaganda in particular insisted that the Illyrians were a culturally backward people, that it was the Romans who had civilised Albania, ancient Rome and Venice having been the only source of progress for backward Albania. As a consequence, it was inferred that only fascist Italy was capable of redeeming Albania”. (CPA, 1973: 3-4)

The seizing of power by the state-socialist regime of Enver Hoxha after the Second World War marked a turning point as Hoxha’s regime “captured” and “re-embedded” the narrative of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and re-shaped it for their own ends.

In 1945, following a campaign to rid Albania of Italian and German occupiers and a subsequent power struggle between various Albanian factions, the victorious Albanian Partisans formed the Party of Labour of Albania, a hard-line Stalinist party, with Hoxha as First Secretary of the Party. The Party of Labour undertook an ambitious project of modernisation, introducing universal education and healthcare and vastly improving infrastructure. At the same time Hoxha's regime took on the task of melding the formerly often divided population into, as Hoxha himself put it, "monolithic unity" (Hoxha quoted in Fischer, 2005: 42). Draper (1997: 1) believes that, in Albania, "Communism provided the first modern, stable, state government and infrastructure upon which overarching ideas of identity, such as nationalism, could readily grow", and that the communist era was therefore "a crucial one for Albanian national ideology". The myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity was a central pillar of the state-socialist regime's nation-building project.

As previously discussed, up until the Second World War narratives and theories about the Illyrians and Albanians had to a large extent been constructed by individuals, states and forces outside of Albania, and beyond Albanian control. The "capturing" or "re-embedding" of the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the means to shape it was an important aspect of the ambitious nation-building project of Hoxha's regime. Despite of the poor state of the country the regime prioritized efforts to construct a unifying national narrative and poured scarce resources into the archaeological investigation of Illyrian heritage (Galaty and Watkinson, 2006:9, Gilkes, 2001:171). Professor Ilirjan Gjipali, who worked as an archaeologist during the state-socialist era recalled, when I interviewed him in Tirana:

"The dictator said that archaeologists could have whatever they needed. At the time the number of workers for archaeology was 120 just for the Tirana area, and there were eight areas..." (Ilirjan Gjipali, interviewed 09/10/2015)

A similar account was given by archaeologist Muzafer Korkuti when interviewed by Galaty and Wilkinson (2006:10);

"Between 1978 and 1988 we had around 20 projects working ... and the State was paying the workers and every project had no fewer than 20-30 workers ... just workers! There were also photographers, illustrators ... our restrictions were personnel rather than the money"

The following extract from a journal article summarising progress in Albanian archaeological research between 1973 and 1983 makes clear the priorities of the archaeological research so generously funded by Hoxha's regime:

"In the post-liberation years [that is, after the Second World War], archaeological research work has been concentrated mainly in the fields of Illyrian and mediaeval Albanian culture. Linked with these researches [sic] are problems of fundamental historical importance such as the ethno-genesis of the Illyrians ... as well as the problem of Illyrian-Albanian continuity, the autochthony of the mediaeval Albanians and the formation of the Albanian nation" (Zhaneta, 1984:102)

Archaeological research may have been necessary for the bolstering of and promotion of the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity, but it was not sufficient. The theory had to be communicated to the citizens of the Peoples Republic. History, including the ancient history of the Illyrians, was made an important part of the school curriculum (Vickers, 2011) and the government also built and valorised numerous museums and heritage sites where adults, as well as children, could be educated about their heritage and history. An Albanian government document produced in 1973 proudly states an increase in the number of museums from two in pre-communist 1938 to ninety one in 1970 (PLA, 1973a:76). The most ambitious museum building took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, with the country's two largest museums, the National Historical Museum and the Skanderbeg Museum opening in 1981 and 1982 respectively (Gloyer, 2012). Another government document, a retrospective on the Party's achievements produced to mark the fortieth anniversary of the "Victory of the People's Revolution" (PLA, 1984: 33) states that:

"Today, as a result of the Party's enthusiastic support for archaeology ... museums are found throughout the country and there is a great deal of popular interest as well as scientific accomplishment in the area."

In *Archaeological Albania*, a coffee-table book on Albania's archaeological heritage published during the state-socialist era, a caption accompanying a photograph of visitors perusing the National Archaeological Museum sums up succinctly the purpose of the regime's ambitious museum building project:

“The museums of our country serve the patriotic education of the labouring masses and acquaint them with the ancient culture of our ancestors” (Korkuti, 1971:15)

In addition to instilling a sense of shared ancestry and identity the archaeologists, historians and museum curators of state-socialist era Albania had to integrate their findings into a broad meta-narrative which Malcolm (2002:73) calls “the myth of permanent national struggle”. A sense of this meta-narrative and its place at the core of Albanian identity is given by the opening paragraph of the Albanian national constitution as penned by Hoxha in 1976:

“Throughout the thousands of years of their history, the Albanian people have defended their existence as a people and nation in struggle against their external and internal enemies, have fought for national freedom and independence, for their native land and mother tongue, for their livelihood and social justice” (Hoxha, 1976:1)

That this narrative was projected back to the time of the Illyrians and their wars against Greek and Roman occupation is illustrated by a speech which Enver Hoxha gave in the north Albanian town of Shkodër:

“We are the descendants of the Illyrian tribes. Into the land of our ancestors have come the Greeks, the Romans, the Normans, the Angevins, the Byzantines, the Venetians, the Ottomans and numerous other invaders, without ever having been able to destroy the ancient Illyrian civilisation and later the Albanians” (Enver Hoxha quoted by Gilkes, 2001:169)

Another example of this kind of discourse – chosen from amongst many - is the opening paragraph of the illustrated coffee table book, *Archaeological Albania* mentioned earlier. It contributes to a narrative of permanent struggle and of “fortress Albania”:

“Albania is a country of ancient culture. Its soil has been inhabited since prehistoric times by the ancestors of the Albanians. The Illyrians and, later, the Albanians built castles and forged weapons to defend themselves from the attacks which came from all directions...” (Korkuti, 1971:1)

This historical meta-narrative merged seamlessly into the permanent war footing which was maintained by the Hoxha regime. Struggle against Western imperialists, Yugoslavian and Soviet imperialists and Greek “monarcho-fascists” were represented as continuations of the eternal struggle for national survival. The “state of siege” and “fortress Albania” narratives were useful to Hoxha; fears of enemies within and without justified repression while imaginings of epic historical struggles gave the toil, shortage and hardship experienced by ordinary Albanians a patriotic, even romantic, purpose.

The main point that I want to make here regarding the state-socialist era (re)construction of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity is that it was very much carried out from the “top down”. The regime was intent on educating the Albanian people and did so in a didactic way. Another point I want to make is that, while before the Second World War representations of the ancient Illyrians were shaped to a large extent by individuals and organisations from out-with Albania, under Hoxha’s regime discourse was “captured” by the ruling Albanian elite. This nationalisation of archaeology and of the interpretation of archaeological finds can be seen as a kind of “embedding” of Illyrian heritage in the Albanian nation-state. That said, notions of the “embedding” and “dis-embedding” of memory are here, as in most instances, relative and debateable. Hoxha’s regime often acted to replace local memory with “national memory”, and the regime was particularly forceful in the deconstruction and elimination of the tribal or clan identities which persisted in some mountain regions (Vickers, 2011). The myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity was likely quite “foreign” to some of those to whom it was taught.

## 4.2. Representations of Illyrian-Albanian Continuity in Post-Socialist Albania

I have argued in section 3.1 that up until the fall of the state-socialist regime the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity was generally taught to the Albanian people in a didactic fashion from the “top down”. An important question which arises is whether or not the majority of the Albanian people actually embraced and internalised the myth about which they were taught. I will now go on to argue that the majority of Albanian people today *have* embraced and internalised the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity. I begin with a discussion of the ways in which the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity has been incorporated into popular culture and embedded in everyday life during the post-socialist era.

During the post-socialist era various Albanian businesses have adopted signs and symbols of the Illyrians as names and logos. Examples include the Hotel Iliria at the Albanian beach resort of Durrës, the Illyria restaurant in the north Albanian town of Shkodër, a Teuta wedding boutique named after the Illyrian queen Teuta (a symbol of Albanian patriotism due to her resistance to Roman colonisation) in the Kosovan town of Prizren (see figure 4.1) and Kaon Beer named after an Epirote tribe who once inhabited the region where it is brewed (the website of the Kaon Beer company refers to the Kaon tribe as Illyrian). It is significant that these brands and symbols have not been constructed or adopted in response to diktat “from above” but rather have been created in response to the popularity of “Illyrian” signs and symbols amongst the Albanian people.

The production and consumption of Illyria-related brands should be regarded as part of the process of the “democratisation of memory”. Those who have created these brands have made a decision to represent and reproduce a shared memory of Albanian national identity, something that is meaningful to them and to their customers. Calling a wedding boutique after an Illyrian queen is not quite the same as constructing a museum, but it is a representation of continuity between the ancient Illyrians and modern Albanians nonetheless. And those who consume these products are also part of the process of the reproduction of myth and memory. As Curtin and Gaither (2005: 101) point out,

Figure 4.1. Wedding boutique in Prizren, Kosovo, named after Illyrian Queen Teuta





“Consumption ... does not mark the end of a linear process but a point in a circular one”. Demand for Albanian products which represent signs and symbols of “Illyrian-ness” ensures their continued or increased production.

This proliferation of different representations of “Illyrian-ness” embeds the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity into the townscapes and cityscapes where they are encountered and into the experience of everyday life in Albania. These signs and symbols of “Illyrian-ness” are added to the “matrix of images, ideas, spaces, things, discourses and practices” (Edensor, 2002: 17) which contribute to a sense of national – in this case Albanian – identity. Signs and symbols of “Illyrian-ness” give the townscapes and cityscapes where they are encountered a distinctly Albanian character. Even if, like Billig’s (1995: 41) “un-waved flag”, these signs and symbols of “Illyrian-ness” are typically experienced in an un-reflexive way they are distinctly Albanian examples of “the plethora of everyday, mundane signifiers” (Edensor, 2002: 51) of the nation which make it feel like home.

The enduring popularity of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity is related in part to regional geopolitics. The first decade of the post-socialist era saw a resurgence of ethno-nationalism in parts of the Balkan region including in those areas out-with the Republic of Albania which are inhabited by Albanian ethnic minorities. This turn to ethno-nationalism had begun before Albania’s state-socialist regime had fallen. The semi-autonomy which Kosovo had been granted by Yugoslavia’s state-socialist government was brought to an end by the increasingly ethno-nationalist regime of Slobodan Milosevic in 1989 and shortly afterwards thousands of Albanians employed by the state, including teachers and doctors, were fired from their jobs (Judah, 2008). This did not go unnoticed in Albania. In 1992 the newly elected Prime Minister, Sali Berisha, responded to events in Kosovo, and the popular reaction to those events within Albania, by telling his supporters:

“Our brothers, living in their territories in the former Yugoslavia and wherever they are: the DPA [Democratic Party of Albania] will not stop fighting until her great dream of uniting the Albanian nation comes true” (Berisha quoted in Vickers, 1999:230).

This rhetoric was not backed by action and, under pressure from the USA and EU, Berisha curtailed his nationalist cant (Vickers and Pettifer, 2007). Outrage about the plight of the

Kosovar Albanians only increased within Albania, however, as Milosevic's regime moved from repression to ethnic cleansing in the late 1990s. There remains today a great deal of bitterness on both sides, Albanian and Serb, about the issue of the contested territory of Kosovo.

While relations between Albania and Greece have been better than relations between Albania and Serbia tensions over the contested territory of Epirus have not entirely disappeared. Small populist far-right-wing parties in each country - LAOS and Golden Dawn in Greece and the Kuo-i-Zi or Red and Black party in Albania - still raise the spectre of irredentism (Vickers and Pettifer, 2014). Mainstream politicians and civil servants from Albania and Greece have also, on occasion, made inflammatory comments. In 2012, on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Albanian independence, Berisha referred to "all the Albanian lands from Prevesa [in Greece] to Preshevo and Skopje [in Macedonia] to Podgorica [in Montenegro]" while a year earlier, in the south east Albanian town of Korça, a Greek consul caused alarm when he referred to southern Albania as "northern Epirus" (Vickers and Pettifer, 2014:34).

One particular incident makes the link between popular attachment to the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and geo-politics particularly clear; an incident which occurred during a football match between Albania and Serbia which took place in Belgrade on October 14<sup>th</sup> 2014. The match was disrupted when a remote controlled drone hovered over the pitch carrying a banner emblazoned with the map outline of "Greater Albania" and the word "autochthonous". This precipitated a riot in the stadium and the Albanian team were lucky to escape unharmed (Montague, 2015: online). The significance here is the meaning of the banner; that Albanians are autochthonous to the region termed "Greater Albania". This claim of autochthony is, of course, based upon the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity. Ismail Morina, the Albanian who had piloted the drone from a nearby church tower, told an American journalist that he had wanted "to say to the Serbs that it is the Albanians that are native to the Balkans" (Montague, 2015: online). Banners and T-shirts decorated with the shape of "Greater Albania" and the word "autochthonous" were on sale in Tirana at the time of the match and were sported by many young men during and after the event. The theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity has become enmeshed with shared memories of, and sentiments about, events in Kosovo. This is, I believe, one reason why it has remained an important facet of Albanian popular culture in the post-socialist era. The enduring popularity of the myth of

Illyrian-Albanian continuity can only be understood in the context of contemporary geo-political tensions.

Many museums and heritage sites in Albania, and in Kosovo, are authoritative “places of memory” where the intellectual foundations for claims of Albanian autochthony are constructed and reproduced. In addition to various books and documentaries produced in Albania and Kosovo they bolster Albanian’s sense of their moral right to “their” home-lands. It became apparent during the course of my research that almost every state-owned museum in Albania that had an archaeological display used that display to promote the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity in some way. I will illustrate this through description and analysis of the narrative content of key “official” state-funded museums, beginning with arguably the largest and most important museum in Albania, the National Historical Museum (NHM) which is located in central Tirana.

Built in the early 1980s the National Historical Museum still reflects, in some ways, the national narrative constructed by Enver Hoxha’s regime. A huge state-socialist era mosaic above the entrance which is called “The Albanians” depicts a linear progression of figures from Illyrian warriors, through Skanderbeg’s army and the scholars and fighters of the *Rilindja Kombëtar* (or National Renaissance) to the Partisans of the Second World War and the workers and soldiers of the state-socialist regime itself (see figure 3.2). This kind of linear depiction of the nation’s history is also presented inside the museum. The NHM is arranged chronologically so that the visitor begins in the “First Pavilion of the Ancients”, which houses artefacts from the pre-historic era up to the early classical era, moves on to the “Second Pavilion of the Ancients” in which are housed artefacts from the era of classical antiquity and then moves on to the “Pavilion of the Middle Ages” and so forth up toward the present day.

The final cabinet in the “Second Gallery of the Ancients”, which the visitor passes just before proceeding to the “Pavilion of the Middle Ages”, specifically addresses the subject of Illyrian-Albanian continuity. An information panel makes the narrative content and “message” of the cabinet quite clear:

“Besides the geographical position, language, customs, culture and history the Albanians inherited their name too, that was Arber, as the name of the Illyrian community that lived in the area currently known as the midlands of Albania.

**Figure 4.2. The state-socialist era mural “The Albanians” depicts a linear Illyrian-Albanian history**



The exhibited cultural objects are a demonstration of the continuity of the Illyrian (Albanian) population into the medieval period and further in time” (Information panel in the NHM, viewed June 2014)

One of the items on display in this cabinet is a *llabane*, a sort of hooded capote worn by shepherds in the Laberia region of south-west Albania until the mid-twentieth-century. The interpretive label attached notes that the *llabane* is a “costume depicted on some Illyrian coins” (Information panel in the NHM, viewed June 2014). The *llabane* and its likeness on some Illyrian coins are presented as evidence of Illyrian-Albanian continuity. So is another garment, a type of bell-shaped dress called a *xhubleta* which was used in northern Albania and Kosovo until the mid-twentieth century and which is depicted on ancient Illyrian figurines – including one on display in the cabinet. An interpretive label informs the visitor:

“The *xhubleta* represents the earliest clothing in Albania and the Balkans. It brings messages of the Illyrian civilisation in our popular Albanian culture ...” (Information panel in the NHM, viewed June 2014) (Information panel in the NHM, viewed June 2014)

The placing of this cabinet at the exit of the Pavilion of the Ancients is strategic. As the visitors move on from the Second Pavilion of the Ancients and into the Pavilion of the Middle-Ages they are reminded that the Illyrians did not disappear. Rather – according to the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity - they became the Albanians whose continuing history lays ahead, set out in linear chronologically ordered progression.

The kind of linear chronologically ordered presentation of Illyrian-Albanian continuity in evidence at the NHM is quite typical of Albanian museums. When I visited the Archaeological Museum in Tirana a curator kindly explained to me (before the interview took place) both the layout and core narrative of the museum:

“The museum is set out chronologically – so if you start here and follow round the left wall you will go from Prehistory and Bronze-Age through to the Illyrian era, then the Roman era, late antiquity and finally there are some objects from medieval times. But it is important to point out that ... when the Romans invaded

the Illyrians did not disappear but remained with a unique culture and some aspects of that culture can still be seen well after the Roman era was gone” (Curator in the Archaeological Museum, Tirana, interviewed 26/06/2014)

I argued earlier that the enduring popularity of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity can be related to its contemporary geo-political significance and also that many state-funded museums and heritage sites in Albania can be considered authoritative “places of memory” where the intellectual foundations for claims of Albanian autochthony are constructed and reproduced. This is true of both the NHM and the Archaeological Museum in Tirana. In order to provide clearer evidence of the relationship between geopolitics and the representation of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity at museums and geopolitics I turn next to a small museum in the lake-side resort of Pogradec in eastern Albania. While giving a guided tour of this museum the curator explicitly linked the narrative content of her museum to matters of contemporary geopolitics.

The Pogradec Museum, like the NHM, sets out a chronologically ordered linear history of Albania. The first of its two galleries is used to display ancient artefacts found in the surrounding region. While guiding me around this first gallery the curator used the museum collection to demonstrate or “prove” the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and also impressed upon me the geopolitical significance of the theory:

“If you come to Albania you should know about Illyria ... The Illyrians lived in all the western Balkans, from where northern Greece is today to where there is a border between Croatia and Slovenia today – in all this territory in the western Balkans, all along the coast. Most of the data about this is found in Albania ... Today Albanians are considered to be the descendants of the Illyrians. We don’t have a lot of data about their language, but there are many words we know which match those in Albanian today. There are around 1000 words which come from that language. Mostly names of places and rivers, and the names of people, and they are translated only with Albanian today [sic]. So this is one of the strongest arguments that we as Albanians have to say that we are descendants of the Illyrians. In the nationalistic Balkans this is really important, to say that we were

here for more than 2000 years” (Curator of Pogradec Museum: interviewed 20/06/2014)

What this makes clear is that it is contemporary regional geopolitics which makes representation of the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity of such great importance to the curator. The theory is represented as a moral defence of national sovereignty in a region – “the nationalistic Balkans” - where that sovereignty is disputed and under threat.

The second gallery of the Pogradec Museum is a gallery of ethnography, but here again the guide returned to the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity, both “evidencing” the theory and stressing once more it’s geo-political importance. She pointed out two old photographs of men dressed in traditional garb:

“These photos show some of the warriors that fought against the Turkish in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is their war which brought us independence in 1912. But for us it is really interesting also to show the clothes which they wore. This is the traditional dress of men – we call it the *Samel* in Albania [a kilt-like garment also called a *fustanella*]. The origin is from the old Illyrian way of dressing. Illyrian men used to wear almost the same dress – this comes from those traditions so it is another argument we use to show the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity. This is one of the most important parts of our history because it is really, really, important to say that we were here before the Slavs, before every other invader that has come here. Of course there is a lot of work to be done but we have really good strong arguments about that” (Curator of Pogradec Museum: interviewed 20/06/2014)

Here again the curator of the Pogradec Museum relates the importance of representing the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity to contemporary geopolitics. It is “really really important” to her to say that “we”, the Albanians, “were here before the Slavs” because of Kosovo, because of the Albanian minority in Macedonia, because of the way ethnic Albanians have been represented and treated in the recent past and because without the protection afforded by “the West” it could happen again.

Further evidence of both the (re)construction of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity in Albanian museums and the theories contemporary geopolitical significance is provided by

the following quote of a museum guide at the History Museum of Shkodër, a small city in northern Albania. The guide referred to contemporary geo-politics while interpreting an ancient Illyrian grave from the era of Roman occupation on which were carved a row of figures with linked arms.

“In old Roman texts about the Illyrians there is mentioned a “dance for the dead”. In the [nearby] mountains there is still a similar tradition - though it is rare now even in the mountains – but well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century at funerals people would link arms and sway together – not really a dance but that is how it was described. And so here is another example of the continuity between the Illyrians and the Albanians of today. Why do I keep mentioning Illyrian-Albanian continuity? It is important ... We are the only country in the world surrounded by our own people – in Macedonia, in Kosova, in Montenegro, in Greece. So it is important to tell whoever will listen that we are the most ancient people, the most authentic if you like, of the Balkans” (Guide at Shkodër History Museum, interviewed 09/06/2013)

Here again the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity is related to contemporary geopolitics. “Proof” of Illyrian-Albanian continuity is used to demonstrate Albanian autochthony. And that claim of autochthony is related to the issue of Albania’s borders; the perceived injustice of half the Albanian population having been left outside the nation-state since they were drawn by the Great Powers at the Conference of Ambassadors in 1913.

Just as the fate of Albania lay in the hands of the Great Powers in the early twentieth century the fate of Albanian people living in Kosovo and in “Albanian” parts of Macedonia can only be secured by the continued support of “the West” today. That a curators and museum guides in provincial museums like the Pogradec Museum and the History Museum in Shkodër are intent upon persuading “Western” tourists of the moral case for continued “Western” support for Kosovar independence and the semi-independence of the “Albanian” regions of Macedonia is evidence of the fact that international geopolitics is being played out at a local scale in museums, and at heritage sites, across Albania. Museums, like the Pogradec Museum and the History Museum in Shkodër are examples of what Hall (2017: 3) calls the “tourism-geopolitics nexus”.



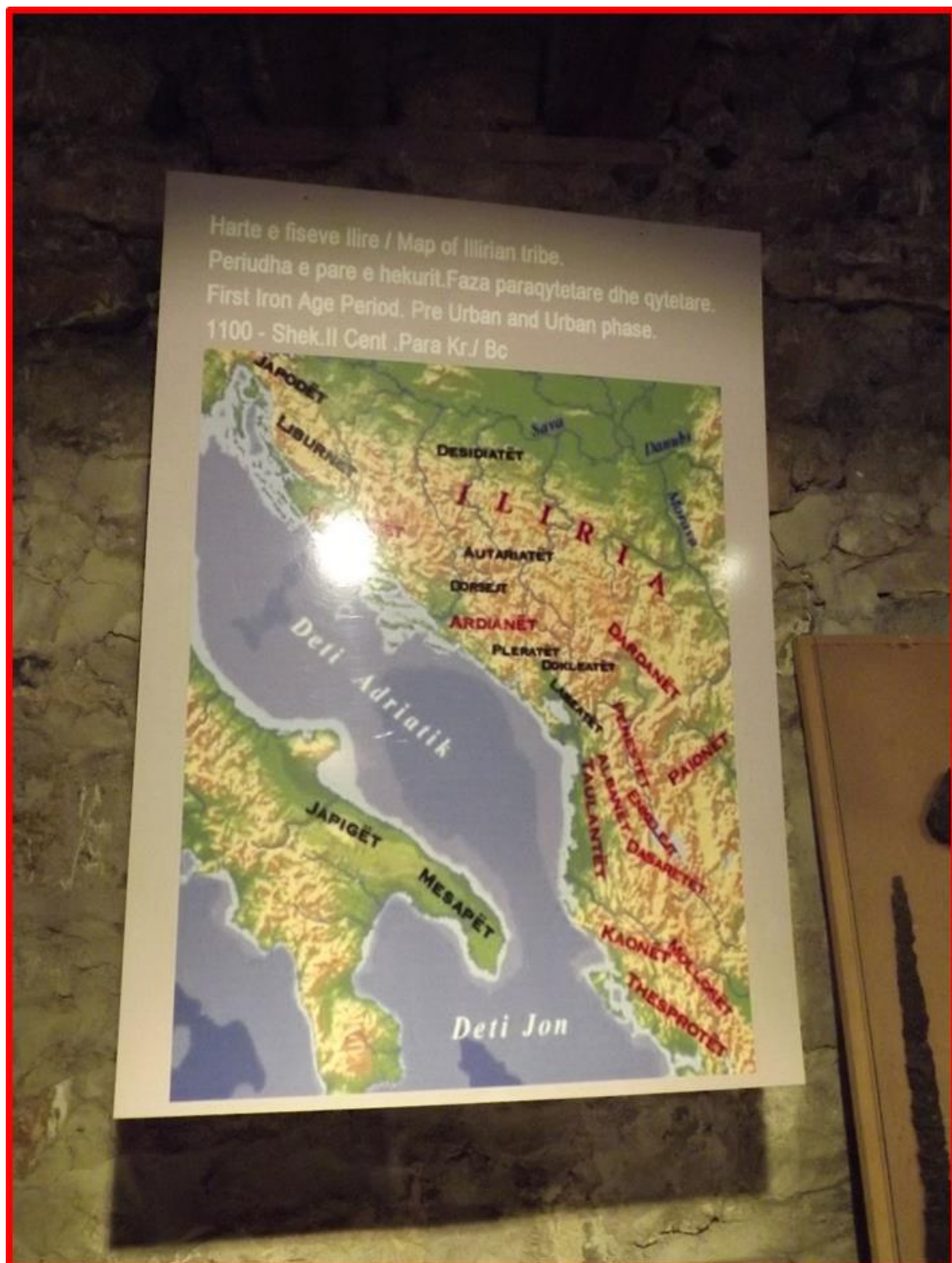
A common feature of the state-funded museums and heritage sites of Albania is the use of maps. The NHM, the Archaeological Museum in Tirana and both the History Museum and Rozafa Castle Museum in Shkodër display maps which depict the distribution of Illyrian tribes (see figure 3.3). As these maps depict Illyrians as having inhabited “Greater Albania” they bolster claims of Albanian autochthony throughout that area. An information panel located by just such a map in the NHM reads:

“The area inhabited by the Illyrians was very vast. They populated an area which was to the North-West bordered by what today is known as Italy. Their North border lies in what today is the Austrian state and from the South down to Ambraki Bay (the Arta Bay of Greece), from the Adriatic and Ionian seas to the West and in the East to the Danube and Thrace [sic]” (Information panel in the National Historical Museum, viewed 02/06/2013)

The claim that Illyrians inhabited lands as far south as Arta Bay, which is backed by the map showing the distribution of Illyrian tribes, is particularly controversial as it is based on the assumption that the ancient inhabitants of Epirus, the Epirotes, were Illyrian. As mentioned earlier this is against a Greek counterclaim that the Epirotes were Hellenic. Further on in the same gallery another map depicts, with arrows, the arrival of Slavic tribes into the southwest Balkan Peninsula. It is accompanied by an information panel which addresses the arrival of the Slavs in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. The following extract from the panel links this event with the narrative of Albanian autochthony:

“[The Slavic tribes] continued their expansion in various regions like Dardania (nowadays known as Kosova), Genta (nowadays known as Montenegro) ... The consequence of this invasion changed forever the ethnic composition of the Balkans while the Albanians were the only direct successors of the oldest and not Greek nation, the Illyrians [sic]” (Information panel in the NHM, viewed June 2014)

Figure 4.3. Map in the Rozafa Castle museum showing the distribution of Illyrian tribes. It represents Epirote tribes in what is today northern Greece as being Illyrian.



Here it is apparent, once again, that in addition to presenting and reproducing the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity curators at museums and heritage sites in Albania are actively linking the myth with historical and contemporary geopolitics.

I argued earlier that the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity has become part of popular culture in post-socialist Albania, and also that it is a facet of the national narrative which is meaningful to many or most Albanians because of recent and contemporary geo-political issues. I have also provided evidence that the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity continues to be presented as “fact” at state-funded museums in Albania and that the theory is being related, sometimes quite overtly, to geo-politically significant and contentious claims of autochthony throughout the region of “Greater Albania”. There appears to be congruence between the popular understanding of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and representations of the myth at state-owned museums. The map on the banner which caused outrage at the football match in Belgrade and the maps in Albanian museums make exactly the same point about Albanian autochthony. What, then, does this tell us about the “democratisation of memory” in post-socialist Albania and about the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity? It is to these key issues that I turn next.

It is by now apparent that, regarding the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity at least, the kind of “democratisation of memory” described by Atkinson (2008) has not occurred in post-socialist Albania. Atkinson observes, in the context of the UK, a kind of disenchantment with “the great stories of traditional historiography” (Atkinson, 2008: 381) and a shift away from the production of “a singular uncontested history” by “experts who knew what was notable and important about our past” (Atkinson, 2008: 382). But it is evident that in post-socialist Albania “official” discourse on the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity remains overwhelmingly popular amongst Albanian citizens. It is not contested “from below” by “ordinary” Albanians. On the contrary, it has become a popular and meaningful facet of Albanian popular culture. This was clearly in evidence during and after the football match that took place in Belgrade on October 14<sup>th</sup> 2014. The myth has contemporary relevance. It is still understood amongst Albanians as being crucial to claims of Albanian autochthony in “Greater Albania” and as being the moral justification Kosovar independence and for the semi-independence of the “Albanian” parts of Macedonia. While the kind of “democratisation of

memory” described by Atkinson (2008) is not in evidence here this does not mean that the “democratisation of memory” has not taken place. It is just that the “democratisation of memory” has taken a different form in the Albanian context.

In section 2.2 of the literature review I discussed the differences between liberal and illiberal democracies and suggested that liberal and illiberal forms of the “democratisation of memory” should be recognised. It is to the question of the nature of the “democratisation of memory” in the Albanian context – whether it is liberal or illiberal – that I turn next. Is the “democratisation of memory” of a kind which allows for a plurality of voices, the kind observed and celebrated by Atkinson (2008), or is it of an illiberal kind which prohibits “alternative” views? Regarding the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity I believe that the “democratisation of memory” has been liberal. In order to demonstrate this I return to the, the National Historical Museum in Tirana.

As discussed earlier, the narrative content of the interpretive panels at the NHM is didactically supportive of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity. It is in fact an “illiberal” kind of discourse which allows no room for alternative perspectives. However, during one of my visits to the museum I observed that one of the museum curators, Sali Kadria, was providing a group of English speaking tourists with a narrative that was quite different to that presented on the information boards and labels. For example, he paused by the fore-mentioned map in the Second Gallery of the Ancients which shows the distribution of Illyrian tribes extending south into Epirus, and explained to the visitors:

“This is political. The area of Albania that was once called Epirus has been claimed by the Greeks and so they say that all of Epirus is really Greek. And as an argument against this, and also because many Albanians used to live in that part of Greece and it was once considered to be part of Albania, some Albanians like to argue that Epirus was Illyrian and so really Albanian” (Sali Kadria, NHM curator, observed and interviewed in Tirana 02/09/2015)

In contrast to the narrative of the interpretive information boards – a didactic presentation of a linear national history – Sali provides an open liberal interpretation of the kind described by Knell *et al* (2012). He explains the political significance of rival theories and favours neither one nor the other, allowing the visitors to form their own opinions. I asked Sali if the way he

was representing history and heritage in his guided tour reflected a change of thinking and approach by the NHM as an institution. He replied that it did not, adding:

“Although over the past two decades, among the intellectual circles of Albania, some have attempted to reconsider the national history of Albanians in view of the currents of modernist, postmodern and mainly ethno-symbolist theories ... in general I think that mainstream academic opinion in Albania is still based on the primordial theory. Here at the National Historical Museum the majority is still of that opinion” (Sali Kadria, interviewed 02/09/2015)

It appears, then, that Sali, is an outlier. Along with the “circle of intellectuals” he describes he is part of a small cohort of individuals who have adopted “alternative” perspectives on the nation and national identity. But, importantly, the fact that Sali is able to openly express alternative theoretical views to the majority of his colleagues at the NHM, and furthermore that he is allowed to provide visiting tourists with an alternative “unofficial” narrative when running guided tours, is clear evidence of the liberalisation of the country, and of the museum as an institution, in the post-socialist era. This liberalisation allows a diversity of opinions and of “memories” to be held and expressed. In other words it allows a liberal kind of “democratisation of memory” to occur. Even though the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity is popular, and representations of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity can be described as “populist”, the expression of “alternative” views and perspectives is not prevented. It is just that such views are relatively rare.

In his description of the “democratisation of memory” Atkinson (2008) writes of the emergence “plural voices” which dispute and undermine “official” discourse. As noted above there is little popular will amongst the Albanian public to dispute or undermine “official” discourse on the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity. The myth is, however, disputed and undermined by “voices” from outside the nation-state. These counter-narratives can be put into two categories. On the one hand there are geopolitically instrumental counter-narratives constructed in Serbia, Macedonia and, less often, Greece with the aim of undermining claims of Albanian autochthony. And on the other there are “universalist” counter-narratives constructed in “the West” with the aim of undermining ethno-nationalism in the region *per se*. I will discuss each in turn.

Ever since the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity was first formulated in the nineteenth century there have been counter-theories which deny Albanian claims of autochthony in the western Balkans, and these have typically been propagated by those countries which have had border disputes with Albania or by their Great Power backers. The contestation of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity by academics with ethno-nationalist agendas continues to take place today. One example is an article by Dusan Batakovic of the Serbian academy of Sciences and Arts which is provocatively entitled “Kosovo and Metohija: Serbia’s troublesome Province”. In this article Batakovich (2008:246) states;

“There is no tangible scholarly evidence for ethnic or cultural continuity between ancient Illyrians and modern Albanians ... it is a case of historical revisionism that, by projecting the current demographic situation back into the past, seeks to provide its legitimacy and thus discredit any claim, past or present, Serbia might lay to Kosovo”

This critique is similar to “anti-nationalist” critiques of a kind I will discuss later, but the difference between Batakovic’s article and anti-nationalist discourse becomes apparent later in the article. Batakovich (2008:247) goes on to state;

“In actual fact [contemporary] Kosovo is a second Albanian state ethnically cleansed of both Serbs and other non-Albanian communities, a second Albanian state extended *into the medieval heartland of contemporary Serbia*” [italics mine].

It is at this point, the point at which Serbian national mythology is uncritically brought into the broader narrative of the article, that the agenda of the author becomes apparent. It is not a critique of ethno-nationalism *per se* but rather a case of one nation’s mythology being set against and prioritised over that of another. The narrative content of Batakovich’s (2008) article and the narrative content of the Albanian museums discussed above are shaped in relation to each other. When the curator of the Pogradec Museum (Interviewed in Pogradec: 20/06/2014) told me that “it is really, really, important to say that we were here before the Slavs” she was highlighting the importance of being able to claim autochthony in this context of geo-political contestation. Schatz *et al* (1999: 155) point out that a real or perceived threat to the nation can heighten nationalist fervour because citizens “perceive a need to unite in a staunch and unwavering manner to resist ostensible threats to their country”. Ironically, then,

the kind of Serbian ethno-nationalist discourse discussed above may serve to reinforce that produced in Albania and *vice versa*.

I turn next to those counter-narratives which come not from any rival ethno-nationalist perspective but rather from the constructivist, post-modernist and liberal-internationalist perspectives of mainstream “Western” or “Westernised” academics and elites. These “Western” or “Westernised” academics produce narratives which challenge ethno-nationalism *per se* rather than singling out particular nations and national narratives as being illegitimate. Kohl (1998:223) sums up the way in which such academics and elites view ethno-genesis myths such as the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity;

“Archaeological cultures and ethnic groups are not synonymous, and modern constructivist perspectives on ethnicity and nationality preclude the possibility of a perfect correlation between material remains and ethnicity”.

On the final page of *The Illyrians*, one of the few major works on the ancient Illyrians to have been published outside of Albania in the last few decades, the British historian John Wilkes sets out an alternative way of imagining Albanian ethno-genesis;

“... the Albanian culture, as fascinating and varied as any in that quarter of Europe, is an inheritance from the several languages, religions and ethnic groups known to have inhabited the region since prehistoric times, among whom were the Illyrians.” (Wilkes, 1992:280)

This is a narrative which is less linear than the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity. It emphasises change and flow, inter-mixing and hybridisation. It is rooted in universalism and anti-essentialism/anti-nationalism; part of a wider discourse that challenges not just myths of Albanian national identity but *all* myths of national identity.

There are museums and heritage sites in Albania at which curators and managers try to change the way Albanians think about their heritage, where curators try to replace notions of linear ethnic descent with a “universalist” conception of cultural-hybridity. These museums and heritage sites are not funded by the state but rather by foreign, “Western”, NGOs. I will discuss these important sites and organisations later in some detail. First, though, I want to set out the context in which these “Western” NGOs have become influential. Their influence

is connected to the implementation of “Western” neo-liberal economic policies in the post-socialist era.

Following their election victory in 1992 the Democratic Party implemented policies which were, as Christensen (1994:557) puts it, “based on the conventional prescription for structural adjustment: trade liberalisation, and market and institutional reform”. This shift to the neo-liberal “Washington Consensus” economic policies, which were prescribed by “Western” institutions and states at the time, necessitated deep cuts to state spending. Vickers and Pettifer (2000:122) observe that, “As part of the [post-socialist] process of reconstruction and renewal, the [Albanian] government has seen it as fundamental that cultural institutions ... are subject to market discipline ...” Hodges (2000), a British archaeologist who worked in Albania during the 1990s and 2000s, observed severe cuts to the Albanian Institute of Archaeology which resulted in the loss of staff, the cancellation of research projects and the neglect and closure of museums. Museums have closed down in Korça, Peshkopia, Bajram Curri and Tepelena and many of those museums which have remained open, like the town museums in Burrel and Pogradec, have not been renovated since the state-socialist era. The following comparison of the state-socialist era and the post socialist era made by a former archaeologist aged in his fifties or sixties and now working as a caretaker and guide in a small provincial museum provides evidence of the impact of post-socialist era austerity as experienced by a heritage professional;

“As an archaeologist it was better then. For the communists archaeology was very important and an archaeologist had good status. There was much funding for archaeology, for ethnography, for monuments and museums. But these days ... [he ended the sentence with a resigned shrug and wave of his hand, his own predicament and the neglected state of the little museum speaking, in effect, for themselves]” (Archaeologist and museum guide: interviewed 20/06/2013)

In some instances where funding for the up-keep and management of museums and heritage sites was withdrawn by the Albanian government that funding has been replaced by funding from NGOs from outside Albania. The maintenance of particular museums and heritage sites, as well as the careers of some Albanian archaeologists and other heritage professionals, has become dependent upon funding from these “Western” organisations.



When discussing the closure of a museum in the nearby town of Korça the curator of the Pogradec Museum – itself somewhat dilapidated - told me;

“Today in Albania, if you don’t have foreign universities [which have taken on some archaeological projects] or foreign NGOs to invest you have nothing. The government today, they don’t have lots of money, but they also don’t have lots of interest” (Curator of Pogradec Museum, interviewed 20/06/2014)

Funding by foreign organisations has transformed the fate of some important archaeological heritage sites in Albania. The Spanish Fund for the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals financed the renovation and re-opening of the museum at the important archaeological site of Apollonia. In 2011 that museum opened to the public for the first time in 20 years having been closed down due to government spending cuts in 2001 (UNESCO, 2011: online). In other places such as Kamenica and Gjirokastër smaller projects funded by “Western” NGOs have added much needed tourist infrastructure. But projects such as this also involve the re-interpretation of Albanian heritage. As Pluciennik and Drew (2000:79) observe, most of the foreign experts involved in the conservation and re-interpretation of Albanian heritage are “much more sympathetic to anti-essentialist views of identity as fluid and contextual” than they are to the kind of ethno-nationalist views of history held by many Albanians. The way in which the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies and the subsequent intervention of “Western” NGOs has, in effect, “dis-embedded” “Albanian” heritage from democratic control or influence in some places is illustrated by the example of Butrint. It is to Butrint that I turn next.

Butrint is an archaeological site situated on the Albanian coast close to the border with Greece. It is a remarkably rich site with well-preserved remains of Hellenic, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman provenance. The excavation and development of the site by Italian archaeologists and its valorisation for the purposes of Italian propaganda prior to the Second World War has been discussed earlier. The site was redeveloped as a heritage site by the state-socialist regime in the 1960s, though due to its proximity to the Greek border only select individuals were allowed to visit. After Hoxha’s death in 1985, in an effort to accumulate foreign currency, tightly controlled tourism from nearby Corfu was trialled. The museum was enlarged and refurbished in 1988 and a stone tablet engraved with the statement “Besides

the Greek and Roman Cultures, another ancient culture developed and prospered here: the Illyrian culture” – a quote attributed to Enver Hoxha – was incorporated into the museum wall (Hodges, 2012). In 1991, at the beginning of the post-socialist era, government cuts left the site vulnerable to degradation, vandalism and looting.

In 1992, shortly after the Democratic Party of Albania had been elected into office, Butrint was awarded UNESCO World Heritage status. In the same year Lord Rothschild visited the site at the invitation of the then Director of the Institute of Archaeology. The following year Lord Rothschild, along with Lord Sainsbury of Preston Candover, created the Butrint Foundation, an NGO dedicated to conserving “not only the site but also its magical Homeric setting” (Hodges, 2012: 309). To take charge of this project the trustees employed British archaeologist Professor Richard Hodges. In addition to ensuring the conservation of the site Hodges also took on the task of re-interpreting the site for the post-socialist era and for foreign tourists. In his writings about his time at the Butrint Foundation Hodges (2012, 2017) is critical of the essentialist and nationalist ways in which the site has been interpreted and defined in the past by the Italians, the Greeks, Albania’s state-socialist regime and even by UNESCO. Hodges and Paterlini (2013: 258) note that the state-socialist era custodian of Butrint, the Institute of Monuments, prioritised the valorisation of “the well preserved multi-period fortifications” which served to illustrate “the nation’s long history of defiance against aggressors”. This fitted into the meta-narrative of “fortress Albania” which was propagated by the regime at the time.

The way in which Butrint is imagined and represented by the Butrint Foundation is quite distinct from those previous nationalist representations. As Hodges (2017: 41) explains, “The [Butrint Foundation] team possessed a cultural antipathy to nationalist models, and ... a willingness to champion internationalism based upon post-war Mediterranean archaeological research” (Hodges, 2017: 41). This is apparent in Hodges’ own description of the “essence” of the site;

“For much of its history Butrint as a town belonged to the Mediterranean Sea, a maritime place imbued with a palimpsest of memories, which necessarily engaged in an essential dialogue with its hinterland and/or other Adriatic Sea communities.

The history and scale of these changing rhythms is the essence of this place, its monuments, its art and material culture” [italics mine] (Hodges, 2012:19)

While, as Hodges (2012:2) notes, the Butrint Foundation “proposed a new paradigm for the history of the site” the Foundation’s Albanian collaborators, “had their own historical paradigm rooted in sustaining a national myth of contemporary historiography” (ibid). The task of designing new information panels for the site, undertaken in 1996, laid bare the differences in thinking between the Butrint Foundation and its Albanian partners. Hodges recalls;

“The Albanian authorities favoured an established nationalist model for the information, whereas the Butrint Foundation wished to convey the changing place of Butrint in the trans-national Mediterranean between later prehistory and the 20th century. In other words the Butrint model looked to communicate with all types of visitors as opposed to sustaining nationalist concepts about the archaeological site, largely incomprehensible to most tourists” (Hodges, 2012: 316)

Elsewhere Hodges (2017: 87) reflects;

“In retrospect, our neo-liberalism was verging on what Herzfield has criticised as crypto-colonialism (2002), as we ignored rather than involved our Albanian colleagues in managerial decision making”.

The content of the information panels and other interpretative materials available at the site reflects the fact that it was the Butrint Foundation which had the final word on the matter. A leaflet and site map which is provided at the park entrance along with entry tickets states;

“Butrint is a microcosm of Mediterranean history, representing in all its phases of development the rise and fall of the great empires that dominated the region. What you see today is an amalgam of monuments representing a span of over two thousand years from the Hellenistic temple buildings of the 4th century BC to the

Ottoman defences created in the early 19th century” (Leaflet provided on site 03/04/2015)

It is clear that this narrative has more in common with Hodges’ writings on Butrint than with the sort of narrative communicated at places like Albania’s National Historical Museum. It is an interpretation of the site which asserts the kind of “universalist” discourse discussed in section 2.3 of the literature review. The same is true of the information panels which are placed at points of special interest on the site trail. On these there is a marked emphasis on Butrint’s links with the wider Mediterranean region. For instance an information panel referring to a Roman villa on the periphery of the site states;

“Huge amounts of amphorae and table ware have been discovered here, showing trade connections from both the western and eastern Mediterranean; oil from Spain, fine table wares from Tunisia and Asia Minor, wine from Italy, Crete and Syria, and cooking pots from the Aegean” (Information panel viewed 03/04/2015)

In the small on-site museum situated at the end of the trail the emphasis on connectedness continues; for example one information panel features a map showing “Early Roman trading links in the Mediterranean”. On the map are drawings of various artefacts discovered at Butrint along with arrows pointing to their places of origin. Some of the objects, the map reveals, originate from as far afield as what is now Spain. Butrint is presented as having been shaped by flows which criss-crossed the Mediterranean and is imbued with the kind of “global sense of place” promoted by Massey (1991).

The Butrint Foundation has on occasion been accused of neo-colonialism (Hodges, 2012, Hodges, 2017). In light of the genuinely neo-colonialist activities of Italian and German scholars in the past it is perhaps unsurprising that some Albanians might, as Pluciennik and Drew (2000:77) suggest, view current trends with suspicion and “a certain sense of *déjà vu*”. There is, clearly, a profound difference between the motivations and intentions of those archaeologists funded by Mussolini’s regime and those funded by Lords Rothschild and Sainsbury. The former constructed a narrative of place which was rooted in linear conceptions of nations and national histories while the latter have constructed a narrative of place which is “universalist”, “anti-essentialist” and “anti-nationalist”. The commonality between the

actions of the Italian archaeologists and those of the Butrint Foundation, however, is in the “dis-embedding” (Giddens, 1991) of an “Albanian” heritage site; that is the “lifting out” of the site from local, regional or national control and influence.

In his discussion of the “democratisation of memory” Atkinson (2008: 383) writes approvingly of the “emergence of plural voices that complicate, expand upon, dispute or undermine traditional “official” narratives of history”. The Butrint Foundation has introduced a counter-narrative into Albania which disputes and undermines the “official” discourse of Albanian state-funded museums and heritage sites, but this counter-narrative has not come from the Albanian people. Local people were not involved in the re-interpretation of the site and even the Foundation’s Albanian “collaborators” were, as Hodges (2017) admits, sometimes excluded from decision making. The “democratisation of memory”, as described by Atkinson (2008), is a process through which individuals and communities become empowered. It is the (re)construction of heritage, memory and identity “from below” by “ordinary people”. And this is not what has occurred at Butrint.

A combination of, on the one hand, cuts to the state funding of heritage sites and museums necessitated by poverty and by the transition to neo-liberal economic practices and, on the other hand, the opening up of Albania to flows of money and ideas, has resulted in an effective loss of national sovereignty over the important heritage site of Butrint. It is an example of the way in which neo-liberal economic policies of government austerity and of openness to global flows of money can in effect “dis-embed” (Giddens, 1991) heritage from its locale. At Butrint, representations of place which reflected popular myths of Albanian national identity and widely shared “collective memories” have been supplanted by “Western” “universalist” representations of place promoted by a wealthy “Western” NGO. The construction, by the Butrint Foundation, of a “universalist”, “anti-essentialist” and “anti-nationalist” narrative of place may have been well intentioned; Butrint is, after all, a symbolic site in a contested border area. But clearly this is not “democratisation” as most people understand it, and it is not the “democratisation of memory” described by Atkinson (2008). Representations of history and place at Butrint reflect the preferences of wealthy “Western” benefactors and the team of mostly “Western” academics they employ rather than the “memories” of local people.

The “dis-embedding” of heritage and memory by “Western” NGOs is in evidence at other sites in Albania. One is the Gjirokastër Museum in the historic town of Gjirokastër in southern Albania. The creation of the Gjirokastër Museum, which is situated in part of the town’s huge castle, was a project of the Gjirokastër Foundation, a Gjirokastër based NGO which is funded by the Packard Humanities Institute and a number of other mainly “Western” donors. In the words of the Gjirokastër Foundation website the museum “showcases the historic and cultural tradition of the city and its surrounding area, from the prehistoric times to the current era; through historical and archaeological objects, archive material, photographs, film and oral histories” (Gjirokastër Foundation [online] 2017). Having opened in 2012 it is one of the few completely new museums to have been created in Albania in the post-socialist era.

Gjirokastër is situated close to the border with Greece in what was once ancient Epirus and was annexed by Greece during both World Wars. The town and surrounding region also has a significant Greek speaking minority. The “Epirus issue” is thus a contentious one in Gjirokastër. Not far from Gjirokastër there is a significant ancient Epirote heritage site called Antigonea. An information panel in the museum refers to this ancient city;

“Antigonea flourished during the lifetime of King Pyrrhus (319-272 BC) and was named after his wife Antigone, who was the step daughter of King Ptolemy of Egypt. Built on a flat hill top, the city follows a classical town plan ...” (Information panel viewed in Gjirokastër Museum: 07/06/2014)

As significant as what the panel says is what it does not say. Like the information panels at Butrint it avoids the “Epirus issue” entirely. While the narrative content of the Gjirokastër Museum is not overtly “universalist” like that at Butrint it is apparent that the kind of geopolitically contentious narratives typical of state-funded Albanian museums and heritage sites have not been reproduced by the Gjirokastër Foundation.

When I interviewed Sadi Petrela, director of the Gjirokastër Foundation, he explained the Gjirokastër Foundation’s approach to the representation of Epirus and Epirote heritage;

“[We were concerned with] how to deal with Greece ... with the relationship of this area with Greece. Maybe you have heard that there is a big discussion about Epirus. Whether Epirus was Greek or Epirus was Illyrian. There starts the dispute about southern Albania – it belongs to Greece or it belongs to Albania? So we didn’t enter into that very big discussion, which is not guided by history I am afraid. So we decided not to tackle that. The size of the museum would not allow us to deal seriously with that matter and on the other side I personally, and the group working on the museum, are not convinced that the historiographies on either side of the border are really tending to be objective and balanced. Both of them are quite nationalistic and not to be trusted at the moment ... Maybe Epirus was something in between [the Greeks and Illyrians] – a cushion between two groups of tribes in ancient times” (Sadi Petrela interviewed in Gjirokastër: 15/06/2014)

Later, referring to the information panel on Antigonea and King Pyrrhus (which I quoted above) Sadi added;

“You have seen [in the museum] that we have just been telling some facts about Pyrrhus without going deeper and trying to decide to which ethnic group he belongs. That was our approach; not to enter into the “hot” areas that could cause problems with the Greeks. It was not our duty to clean the history of centuries” (Sadi Petrela: 15/06/2014)

What is clear is that a decision was taken by the Gjirokastër Foundation to avoid representing Epirote heritage in a way which might exacerbate geo-political tensions between Albania and Greece. For this reason the Gjirokastër Museum does not (re)construct or disseminate narratives of Albanian autochthony in the region of the kind which are in evidence at state-funded museums such as the NHM. The question that arises is whether this reflects the preferences of local people or only the Gjirokastër Foundation’s “Western” benefactors. Given the widespread popularity of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity the latter seems more likely.

The nature of power relations *within* the Gjirokastër Foundation, specifically the influence of three British trustees on the board of the NGO, was revealed when I interviewed

Edvin Lamce, Project Coordinator at the Gjirokastër Foundation. When asked about the Gjirokastër Foundation's approach to representing Epirote heritage he told me;

"We are here in the region which was known as Epirus. It was a region which was between Illyrians and Greeks. Even in the early 20th century when travellers used to come in this territory they used to say "we arrived in Epirus". The problems that we have now... the Greeks, they claim Epirus was Greek, but we say that Epirus was Epirus, and perhaps the population was mixed; Illyrians and Greeks. We worked with some British colleagues, and revised the text [in the museum] many times, so it is free of this nationalist content I think, which is great" (Edvin Lamce, Project Coordinator, 14/06/2014)

It is apparent from this quote that the British contingent on the board of the Gjirokastër Foundation intervened in order to remove "nationalist content". That the British advisers and trustees could shape the narrative content of the museum in this way is evidence of the power relations within the organisation. The continued existence of the Gjirokastër Foundation is dependent upon the support and good will of American and British benefactors and the authority of the British trustees is ensured by that dependency (These individuals, Professor Richard Hodges, Daniel Renton and Dr Oliver Gilkes have also been on the board of the Butrint Foundation). As at Butrint, the representation of the past constructed at the Gjirokastër Museum was not shaped "from below" by "the public" but rather shaped "from above" by wealthy "Western" NGOs and their "Western" representatives. It is another example of the "dis-embedding" (Giddens, 1991) which can occur – or which can be achieved - when money and ideas flow from wealthy individuals and organisations into relatively poor areas.



### 4.3. Conclusions

To conclude I want to reiterate five key points from this chapter. The first is that the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity has been enduringly popular in the state-socialist era and has been incorporated into popular culture and embedded in every-day life. I have argued that a post-socialist era proliferation of signs and symbols of Albania's Illyrian heritage resulting from their commodification, and the encountering of these signs and symbols in everyday life, has increased popular attachment to the myth. The second key point is that the enduring popularity of the myth is related to its contemporary geopolitical significance. Geopolitical tensions in the region give the claim to autochthony which the myth provides continued relevance. The third key point is that, in post-socialist era Albania, state-funded museums and heritage sites have represented and (re)constructed popular myth rather than attempting to introduce new and challenging narratives. In this they resemble those populist "Western" museums described by Palmer (1999). The fourth key point is that the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies - specifically spending cuts and openness to global flows of money and ideas - plus the involvement of "Western" NGOs in the funding and management of certain heritage sites has resulted in the "dis-embedding" of heritage and memory from some heritage sites in Albania. At these locales representations of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity have been displaced by "universalist", "anti-essentialist" and "anti-nationalist" representations of place.

And finally the fifth and main key point is that in post-socialist Albania the "democratisation of memory" has taken a different form to that observed and described by Atkinson (2008) in "the West". While Atkinson (2008) describes the emergence of multiple voices which challenge and undermine "official" discourse the emergence of plural voices which challenge and undermine "official" discourse on the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity is not in evidence in Albania today. On the contrary, "official" discourse on the theory is both populist and popular. There has been no fragmentation of national identity or national narrative of the kind described by MacDonald (2003) and Ames (2004). Rather a combination of interconnected factors – the proliferation of signs and symbols of "Illyrian-ness" brought about through their commodification, the contemporary geo-political significance and "usefulness" of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the

(re)construction of the popular myth at state-funded heritage sites and museums – all serve to bolster both the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and a sense of shared Albanian ethno-national identity. Against this the efforts and investments of those “Western” NGOs which have endeavoured to introduce a “universalist”, “anti-essentialist” and “anti-nationalist” discourse into Albania has had little widespread effect.

## **5.0. The Myth of Skanderbeg: Introduction.**

In this chapter I focus upon one of the most important myths of Albanian national identity – the myth of Albania’s national hero, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg. There are two key theoretical points which I draw from an analysis of continuities and changes in the way the myth of Skanderbeg has represented and (re)constructed in the post-socialist era. As will become apparent, continuity is, in this instance, more in evidence than change; representations of the Skanderbeg myth have changed little since the state-socialist era and those changes which have occurred are more a reversion to a pre-state-socialist era narrative than a progression to something new. I will argue that this continuity both reflects and results from the enduring popularity of the myth amongst “the people” in Albania and the demand-led populist representation of the myth at Albanian state-owned museums. This shows that the “democratisation of memory” does not necessarily result in the fragmentation of national narratives as MacDonald (2003) and Ames (2004) have suggested but rather that it can result in the kind of demand-led populism at museums and other places of memory which is described by Palmer (1999) and which reproduces popular myths of the nation. I will also argue that a post-socialist era proliferation of signs and symbols of Skanderbeg which has occurred as this popular symbol of Albanian-ness has been “commodified” by various businesses can be considered an aspect of the “democratisation of memory” and that this further re-produces and bolsters the myth of Albania’s national hero.

The second key theoretical point relates to the one significant change in the way the myth of Skanderbeg has been represented in the post-socialist era. This is a renewed emphasis on those aspects of the Skanderbeg myth which serve to flag Albania’s “European credentials”; most notably Skanderbeg’s role in saving Western Europe from Ottoman invasion. The flagging of Albania’s “European-ness” is of geo-political importance at a time when almost all Albanian elites and most of the Albanian population are hopeful for their country’s accession to the EU, but when many in Western Europe still view Albania as an un-European “other”. I will argue that the contemporary geopolitical significance and “usefulness” of the myth accounts, in part, for its enduring post-socialist popularity.

I have divided this chapter into three sections. In section 5.1 I give a brief account of the myth of Skanderbeg as it is widely known and understood today. Then in section 5.2 I give a brief historiography of the myth from its fourteenth century origins through to the last days of

state-socialism. In section 5.3, moving on to the post-socialist era I begin by evidencing the enduring popularity of Skanderbeg, referring to both significant events and everyday objects and practices. Then I will discuss critiques of the Skanderbeg myth from “Western” academics and from the Turkish government, as well as the way in which these critiques have been received. After that I will turn to two important “places of memory”, the Pavilion of the Middle-Ages in the National Historical Museum in Tirana and the Skanderbeg Museum in Kruja. I will analyse the narrative content of these museums and the “performances” which take place there and will discuss the various forces which shape these narratives and performances. Throughout the chapter, drawing on analysis of the two museums and on the wider context in which they exist, I will assess what can be gleaned about the “democratisation of memory” in post-socialist Albania and the way in which the process is shaping Albanian national identity.

### 5.1. The Popular Myth of Skanderbeg

I begin with a brief summary of the story of Skanderbeg as it is generally told and understood in Albania today. The synthesis of a detailed evidence based history of Skanderbeg's life and legacy is beyond the scope of this thesis. In any case the deeds and motivations of Skanderbeg and his place in history remain uncertain and are matter of academic and popular debate (Elsie, 2011, Schmitt, 1997, Kola, 2003). The lack of any verifiable history leaves room for interpretation and imagination, it makes the myth of Skanderbeg particularly malleable. Arguably, the enduring popularity of the Skanderbeg myth can be attributed to this malleability; Edensor (2002: 163) writes of "the multi-interpretability of successful myths". The myth of Skanderbeg is a myth which has been shaped and re-shaped by the contexts of time and place in which it is told but which has remained in some ways unchanged. The version of the Skanderbeg story which I give below is the mainstream contemporary story of Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg. It is the dominant narrative on Skanderbeg in Albania, a story with which most contemporary Albanians are familiar and also that which is told in popular travel guides such as the Bradt guide to Albania (Gloyer, 2012)

Gjergj Kastrioti was born in 1405, the son of a warlord-nobleman, Gjon Kastrioti, who ruled a swathe of what is now central and northern Albania and western Macedonia. Gjon Kastrioti appears to have been an ambitious yet pragmatic man who expanded his territory through frequent changes in allegiance between Venice and various Albanian and Serb warlord-noblemen and, later in his life, the Ottoman Empire. Under Ottoman suzerainty Gjon Kastrioti was required to give two of his sons over to the Ottoman regime to be raised in the Ottoman Sultan's court; a practice known as *devshirme*. In accordance with the *devshirme* these Kastrioti brothers, Gjergj and Stanisha, had to convert to Islam and to train at the Enderun military school in Istanbul. Gjergj excelled at military training and military service, rapidly rising through the ranks. In 1440, three years after the death of his father, Gjergj was made *Sanjakbey* (or governor) of the Sanjak of Dibra, an administrative region of the Ottoman Empire which included much of his late father's fiefdom. In addition to the title of "*bey*", or Lord, Gjergj was given the name *Iskender*, the Turkish form of Alexander, as his fighting prowess and strategic brilliance was compared to that of the legendary Alexander the Great. Thus Gjergj Kastrioti became known as *Iskender Bey* in Turkish, *Skenderbey* in Albanian and *Skanderbeg* in Central and Western Europe. According to the popular myth Skanderbeg

stayed in contact with his family throughout his time in the Ottoman army, and, as Vickers (1999:8) puts it “decided to bide his time before deserting the Ottoman army”.

Skanderbeg’s chance to revolt against the Ottomans came when the Hungarians defeated the Ottoman forces at Niš in 1443. At this opportune moment he took his men and headed to Kruja in present day Albania where he recaptured his father’s citadel either by force or by trickery according to different versions of the myth. At this juncture Skanderbeg is reputed to have converted from Islam to Christianity. According to Vickers (1999:8);

“...after massacring those in the Kastrati [or Kastrioti] domains who refused to renounce Islam he set about establishing himself as an independent lord”.

One year after taking Kruja Skanderbeg organised a meeting of Albanian nobles in the coastal town of Alessio (now the Albanian town of Lezhë), a Venetian enclave, in order to convince them to set aside their rivalries and form a united front against the Ottoman Empire. According to the popular myth his coalition of the willing, which became known as the League of Lezhë, kept much of Albania out of Ottoman control for twenty five years. This is, perhaps, the most important part of the national myth as Skanderbeg is presented as having united the Albanians against a common foe. His success in holding back the considerably larger Ottoman army is presented as evidence of what the Albanian people can achieve when they work together as a nation.

Different accounts of the Skanderbeg myth have, to varying degrees, emphasised or down-played the role of powers and forces from out-with the Albanian inhabited region in Skanderbeg’s campaign against the Ottoman Empire. In her telling of the story Vickers (1999:8) notes;

“Skanderbeg’s military successes evoked a good deal of interest from the Papal state, Venice and Naples, themselves threatened by the growing Ottoman power across the Adriatic. Hoping to strengthen and expand the last Christian bridgehead in the Balkans, they provided Skanderbeg with money, supplies and occasional troops”

At the time of his anti-Ottoman campaign, Elsie (2005:34) points out, Skanderbeg was “widely admired in the Christian world for his resistance to the Turks and was given the title *“Athleta*

*Christi*" (Champion of Christ) by Pope Calixtus III". As will become apparent, Skanderbeg's relationship with "Christendom" and with "Europe" or "the West" has long been, and continues to be, an important facet of the Skanderbeg myth.

On 17<sup>th</sup> January 1468 Skanderbeg died of malaria. Patchy resistance to Ottoman occupation continued for a few years after Skanderbeg's death, but by 1479 all Albanian-inhabited lands were incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. Skanderbeg's young son, Gjon Kastrioti, fled to the Kingdom of Naples, as did many of Skanderbeg's soldiers and supporters. As Skanderbeg had been allied with the King of Naples during his later years many of these refugees, including Gjon Kastrioti and his mother, were allowed to settle in what is now southern Italy. Some of the Albanians who fled to Italy formed communities collectively known as the *Arbëresh* which have retained their distinct identity and language – an archaic form of Albanian - to this day (Vickers, 1999) These *Arbëresh* communities preserved shared traditions and memories, including stories of Skanderbeg, throughout the era in which Albania was occupied by the Ottomans (Elsie, 2005).

## 5.2. A Historiography of the Skanderbeg Myth: 1508-1991

The earliest and the most influential written account of Skanderbeg's life was *The history of the Life and Deeds of Skanderbeg*, a biography written by Martin Barleti, a Catholic refugee who fled to what is now Italy following the Ottoman invasion (Daci, 2008, Nixon, 2010). Barleti's account of Skanderbeg's life, which was originally published in Latin between 1508 and 1510, proved popular in Europe and, over the course of the sixteenth century, was translated into German, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and lastly, in 1596, into English (Nixon, 2010). The Skanderbeg myth inspired numerous other works in various languages over the course of the next four centuries (ibid). Schmidt-Neke (2008) attributes the popularity of the Skanderbeg story at that time to anxiety about the threat of Ottoman encroachment into Christian Europe. Hall (1994:36) notes that the fifteenth century Pope Calistus declared Skanderbeg to have "stopped the fury of the Turkish tide and prevented it from overrunning Christian Europe". Throughout Christian Europe Skanderbeg became a symbol of Christian resistance to the Ottoman threat.

Ashcom (1953:28) observes that, in time, "as the Turk receded from the European imagination, Scanderbeg's literary fortunes sank", but they did not do so entirely. The tale of Skanderbeg's heroic struggle, spiced as it was with an exotic "Oriental" foe and a rugged and mysterious Balkan backdrop, appealed to the Romantic poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most notably Byron and Longfellow who both refer to Skanderbeg in major works; Childe Harold (Byron: 1818) and Tales of a Wayside Inn (Longfellow, 1863: online) respectively. These works, as well as the works of *Arbëresh* writers in southern Italy, maintained an awareness of the Skanderbeg myth in Western Europe allowing it to be "rediscovered" during the nineteenth century by those Albanian cultural and political elites who harboured nationalist ambitions (Elsie, 2005, Schmidt-Neke, 2008).

The Albanian *Rilindja Kombëtar* or "National Awakening" is generally considered to have begun in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, rather later than the nationalist movements of other nations in the south western Balkans. The leading lights of the *Rilindja* movement lobbied for the relaxation of laws which suppressed Albanian culture, such as a ban on teaching in the Albanian language, but were on the most part, during the nineteenth century at least, in favour of remaining part of the Ottoman Empire. Up until around 1912, Vickers (2011:34) explains, most Albanians considered that "autonomy within the [Ottoman]



Empire seemed the best guarantee of their local interests and national safety". Furthermore, as Zhelyazkova (2000) explains, most of the Albanian Elite of the time were either wealthy Muslim landlords or Istanbul educated intellectuals who benefitted from Ottoman rule and related to Ottoman culture. Attachment to the Ottoman Empire and Islam may have made much of the Albanian elite uneasy about the valorisation of the Skanderbeg myth. Skanderbeg and his followers had, after all, slaughtered Albanian Muslims who refused to convert to Christianity, and he had fought against assimilation into the empire to which most of the *Rilindja* leaders still swore allegiance.

There were, however, influential individuals within the *Rilindja* movement who worked to revive and popularise the Skanderbeg myth amongst the Albanian people. Foremost among these were Faik Konitza and Naim Frashëri. Konitza, a Catholic from northern Albania who had been educated in an Austro-Hungarian financed Catholic school and then in "the West", at the University of Dijon and then at Harvard in the USA, promoted the Skanderbeg myth through articles in the periodical *Albania*, a publication which he founded in Brussels in 1909 and which he used to promote Albanian independence amongst the Albanian intelligentsia. Unlike many of the Muslim individuals in the *Rilindja* movement Konitza wished Albania to leave the Ottoman Empire and realign with Austria-Hungary (Licursi, 2011).

More influential still was Naim Frashëri, who is probably Albania's most famous poet even today (Elsie, 2005). Following its anonymous publication in Bucharest in 1898 Frashëri's epic poem "History of Skanderbeg" became the most widely read work of Albanian literature of all time (Elsie, 2005). Sulstarova (2012:394) notes that "During much of the poem, Naim juxtaposes the Albanian hero, Skanderbeg, with a series of the corrupted "Asiatic" and despotic Turkish characters". Like Konitza, Frashëri was an early advocate of Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire, perhaps because the Bektashi Muslim sect which he followed had been outlawed by the Ottoman Porte (Doja, 2000).

As the second decade of the twentieth century began, more and more of the Albanian elite became disillusioned with Ottoman rule. In part this was due to the heavy handed "Turkification" policies of the Young Turks and in part due to evident decline of the Ottoman Empire's military capabilities (Vickers, 1999). The disillusionment of the elite appears to have spread to the wider population. Gawrych (2006:179) notes that by the summer of 1909 Albanian *cetes*, or outlaw bands, carrying the banner of Skanderbeg were distributing leaflets

calling upon Muslim and Christian Albanians to unite against Turkish rule. As a symbol of both anti-Ottoman resistance and Albanian unity Skanderbeg was becoming increasingly popular.

Once having turned against Ottoman rule the Albanian elites faced a pressing problem. While the Slavic Serbs and Montenegrins had thrown off the “Ottoman yoke” with the backing of Russia and the Greeks with the backing of philhellenic Britain and France the Albanians found themselves without a powerful champion and facing the prospect of invasion by irredentist neighbours from all sides. As Guy (2012) and Gawrych (2006) point out, most of the Great Powers had little sympathy for the Albanians who were generally considered to be essentially Muslim and Turkish. The Albanian elite had to act quickly to change European perceptions in order to justify their right to a nation state and to gain military support against their irredentist neighbours. As the myth of Skanderbeg had been kept alive in Europe by numerous creative writers this was an aspect of “un-Ottoman” – indeed “anti-Ottoman” – and “un-Islamic” Albanian identity of which many Europeans were at least dimly aware. Thus it was that, as Misha (2002:43) observes, the Skanderbeg myth became, alongside the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity, a “national argument proving Albania’s affinity to Europe”.

In 1912, free from Ottoman oppression but under attack from the Serbs, Montenegrins and Greeks, a group of eighty three delegates from all over Albania gathered, with diplomatic support from Vienna, in the coastal Albanian town of Vlora to decide the future of their nation (Vickers, 1999:68). Ismael Kemal, a native of Vlora, who chaired the congress and who became Albania’s first Prime Minister, depicts in his journal his sense of the way in which Skanderbeg was “resurrected” following the turn of the majority of the Albanian elite to Western Europe;

“The Congress was at once opened. At its first sitting—November 15th-28th, 1912—it voted unanimously the proclamation of independence. The sitting was then suspended, and the members left the hall to hoist upon my house—the house where I was born and where my ancestors had lived—amid the acclamations of thousands of people, the glorious flag of Skanderbeg, who had slept wrapped in its folds for the last 445 years. It was an unforgettable moment for me, and my hands shook with hope and pride as I fixed to the balcony of the old dwelling the standard of the last national Sovereign of Albania. It seemed as if the spirit of the immortal hero passed at that moment like a sacred fire over the heads of the people.” (Kemal, 1920: online)

With the turn from the crumbling Ottoman Empire to a Great Power of “the West”, and with the declaration of Albania’s existence as a sovereign nation-state, the myth of Skanderbeg became, alongside the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity, a central pillar of the Albanian national narrative.

The first decade of Albania’s existence as a nation-state was chaotic with frequent changes of government. Little effective nation building or economic development took place. It was only in 1924, when Ahmet Zogu took power by military coup that a period of relative stability allowed nation building to proceed effectively (Vickers, 1999:114). Skanderbeg was, for Zogu, a useful symbol of both national cohesion and strong leadership as he tried to take control of the country and subdue various feuding clans and factions. When, in 1928, Zogu crowned himself “Zog I, King of the Albanians” Skanderbeg was woven into the various “invented traditions” (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 1983) which gave a veneer of authenticity to what might be called an “invented monarchy”. Zogu claimed that his mother, Sadije Zogu, could trace her ancestry back to Skanderbeg’s sister, Mamica of Kruja, thus providing himself with a kind of royal lineage (Tomes, 2007:10). A planned coronation ceremony, involving the sword and helmet of Skanderbeg and taking place in the ruins of the Kastrioti’s old castle in Kruja was abandoned due to security concerns but Zog had a portrait painted of himself with the garb – including the distinctive Roebuck-Head Helmet and sword – of Skanderbeg (Schmidt-Neke, 2008, Tomes, 2007). A number of curious folk-myths were also invented at around this time; for example both Zog and Skanderbeg were said to have had a “special birthmark denoting greatness”, and both the “royal” mothers were reputed to have dreamed of giving birth to dragons while pregnant with their illustrious sons (Tomes, 2007:146). The Skanderbeg story continued to be popularised and celebrated more generally at the time. Albanian poets and writers, such as Ernest Koliqi, Vincenc Prennushi and Etehem Haxhiademi, retold the Albanian hero’s tale in their own words (Elsie, 2005)

During Zog’s reign Albania became increasingly reliant on Italian development loans. As noted in the previous chapter, the nominal independence of Albania was reliant upon the support of one or other Great Power until after the Second World War, a case of what Herzfeld (2002) calls “crypto-colonialism”. As Schmidt-Neke (2008:2) observes “The historical alliance between Skanderbeg and Venice ... was set up as a model for the new “partnership” between Zogu’s Albania and Mussolini’s Italy”. It is another example of the Skanderbeg myth being used

to present as right and natural Albania's alignment with "Western" powers. In 1939, in response to Zog's attempts to reassert a degree of sovereignty, Italy occupied Albania and Zog fled to London never to return to his homeland. During occupation the Italian regime's propaganda stressed the existence of "a line of Albanian allies or protégés of Italy" including Skanderbeg who had been assisted in his struggle against the Turks by Venice, Naples and Rome (Schmidt-Neke, 2008:3). After the Second World War the socialist partisans took control of the country and formed a state-socialist government with Enver Hoxha at its helm.

Skanderbeg was, to begin with, an awkward figure for the Enver Hoxha's state-socialist regime to deal with as the national hero had previously been presented as proof of Albania's inherent orientation toward Western Europe. Moreover the national hero had been allied to Rome, like King Zog who the communists reviled, and he had been a Catholic and a feudal lord to boot. For these reasons Skanderbeg should have been anathema to the communist regime but the myth of Skanderbeg had by the mid-twentieth-century become so deeply entwined into Albanian national identity that to attack Skanderbeg would have been tantamount to attacking the nation itself. Enver Hoxha was far too careful and pragmatic to do that. Instead he called for a reinterpretation of history from a socialist perspective. In 1947 Hoxha said the following on the regime's approach to Albanian history;

"We must look to the progressive elements. Looking for instance to Skanderbeg's life, we have to see what have been the progressive elements in his life. He is our national hero. For his time he is progressive, for he led the people against the Turks. But at that time he was a feudal prince aiming at the unification of the principalities and at the founding of a kingdom with him-self at the top. He was declared a saviour of Catholicism, but it must be shown clearly that he defended progress against the Ottomans. He led the people. The peasants fought under his leadership." (Hoxha quoted in Schmidt-Neke, 2008:4)

Rather than trying to lessen the place of the Skanderbeg myth in the national narrative the state-socialist elites resolved to build upon it, stressing those elements which they found favourable and editing out those which they did not. Thus, with financial help from the Soviet Union, the regime engineered a major "re-launch" of the Skanderbeg myth in 1954 with the release of a lavish, high budget movie "The Great Warrior Skanderbeg" (Lubonja, 2002).

Lubonja (2002:96) notes that, in the film, “Skanderbeg’s ties with the Christian world are ignored” and that Skanderbeg’s European allies are portrayed as self-serving and treacherous. Draper (1997:7) points out that, through works such as this movie, “... the communists hoped to mould the story of the Albanian nation to lead naturally to a contemporary and contextualised view of the Communist Party as heir to Skanderbeg’s struggles”. To this end parallels were drawn between the partisan’s resistance to the Axis powers and Skanderbeg’s resistance to the Ottomans (ibid). Here is evidence of the malleability of the Skanderbeg myth and the way in which that malleability has allowed it to remain useful in a variety of political contexts.

In 1961, following a break in relations with the Soviet Union a large statue of Stalin which had stood in Skanderbeg Square was replaced with an even larger socialist-realist style equestrian statue of Skanderbeg himself (Judah, 2008:25). Hall (1994:36) sees this event as “symbolising the superior role of nationalism over communism”. It clearly indicates that Hoxha had completely reassessed his stance on the issue of Skanderbeg’s place in the nation’s history. If statuary can be seen as a form of performance of the nation, then Hoxha and Skanderbeg can be seen, from 1961, as having shared centre stage. Their larger-than-life effigies were the twin focal points at the symbolic heart of the Albanian capital and their roles as defenders of the Albanian nation were increasingly merged into one meta-narrative. “Now” writes Draper (1997:8);

“the five hundred years between Skanderbeg and the League of Lezhë (1444) and Enver Hoxha and the liberation of Tirana (1944), was seen as the story of an oppressed, freedom-loving people, who were continually fighting to throw off the “yoke” of foreign oppression, a struggle that culminated successfully only with the partisan victory in 1944”.

During the 1960s, inspired by his ideological ally Chairman Mao, Hoxha initiated what has become known as the “Albanian Cultural Revolution”. Schmidt-Neke (1997:5) notes that, at the time of this Cultural Revolution, “the Albanian leadership commanded Albanian artists to produce work on the Skanderbeg theme”, and that numerous “statues, paintings, musical compositions, guided pseudo folklore and many literary creations were dedicated to him”. At around the same time Skanderbeg’s hometown of Kruja, was designated the status of “hero city” despite being, as Hall (1994:37) points out, “a rather sparse hillside town of 12,000

people". Though the town was small there could still be seen there the ruins of Skanderbeg's castle where he had survived three sieges during his war against the Ottoman army. It was, thus, a significant "place of memory", elevated in importance by the events which had occurred there at the time of Skanderbeg.

In 1968, a year after Hoxha had declared Albania the world's first atheist country (Hall, 1994:44), and at a time when churches and mosques were still being pulled down all over the country, Hoxha's regime set about rebuilding a Franciscan church which had been destroyed by the Ottomans centuries before. The reason for this was that this particular church, the Church of Shën Koll or St. Nicholas in Lezhë, was the burial place of Skanderbeg. Hoxha's regime had declared the church a national monument, and were partially rebuilding it in order to mark the five-hundredth anniversary of the national hero's death and, for the longer term, to create a shrine, albeit a strictly secular one, for the Albanian people to visit (Hall, 1994:37, Gloyer, 2012:192). A mosaic of the double-headed eagle - the emblem of Skanderbeg's Kastrioti clan and of the Albanian nation - was incorporated into the ruin on the back wall, and in front of this, on a low plinth, were placed replicas of Skanderbeg's distinctive sword and helmet.

Galaty and Watkinson (2006:8) observe that Hoxha used threats to the Albanian nation, both historical and contemporary, "to argue for the importance of a strongly centralised, authoritarian government, a xenophobic foreign policy, and a powerful military". The Albanian dictator spoke of the enemies that surrounded the country;

"...they will never catch us asleep. We will never be lacking in vigilance. Let everyone understand clearly: the walls of our fortress are of unshakeable granite rock." (Hoxha, quoted in Halliday, 1986: 337)

For a besieged fortress nation there could be no finer national hero than the man who had survived three sieges in his castle at Kruja. The grim determination to resist the Ottomans and the stoic endurance of hardship and shortage which Skanderbeg and his followers had shown were an ideal source of inspiration for the Albanian people as they tolerated shortages and waited, on edge, for ever - imminent invasion. In 1982 the regime would construct a large and elaborate museum in Kruja, with the outward appearance of a castle, in which the myth of Skanderbeg would be told through a combination of artefacts, artworks and explanatory

information boards. Ward (1983:96), a British travel writer, who visited Kruja in 1982 shortly after it had opened, commented that Skanderbeg was “constantly compared explicitly and implicitly” with Enver Hoxha, while Hall (1994:136) sees the museum as symbolising “a sense of national continuity by buttressing the common identity and lineage between past and present”. This museum remains in use and is one of the two key sites which I will go on to analyse in its post-socialist context.

In 1985 Enver Hoxha died of natural causes. The personality cult that had been built around him was kept alive by the regime, however, and the comparisons between Hoxha and Skanderbeg continued. Hall (1994:37) notes that 1988, the eightieth anniversary of Hoxha’s birth, “saw Hoxha’s successor, Ramiz Alia, publish the laudatory volume *Our Enver ...* a book written in almost biblical terms, interweaving the Skanderbeg symbolism with a deification of the communist leader”. The following extract illustrates this well;

“For 500 years on end our people have kept alive the legendary figure of Skanderbeg and have been kept alive by it. Just as the battles and deeds of Skanderbeg inspired the Albanians’ patriotism and spirit of resistance even in the most dramatic moments of the life of the nation, so the name and work of Enver Hoxha will remain through the centuries a banner of the struggles of our people for socialism and the prosperity of our Homeland” (Alia, 1988 quoted in Hall, 1994:37-8)

Alia’s prediction, that the name of Enver Hoxha would remain through the centuries a banner of the prosperity of the Albanian’s homeland, did not prove entirely accurate. The regime fell in 1991, and myth and history were reassessed once again.

The main point which I want to draw from this historiography is that, prior to 1991, the myth of Skanderbeg was used by elites in an instrumental “top-down” way. Influential individuals in the *Rilindja* movement who favoured independence from the Ottoman Empire promoted the Skanderbeg myth so as to inspire both national pride and anti-Ottoman sentiment amongst the Albanian people. When Albania gained independence it was the emblem of Skanderbeg which was chosen as the national flag and Skanderbeg was promoted as a defining myth of the nation. “King” Zog claimed descent from the Kastrioti family in order to justify his right to rule as absolute monarch and, later, Enver Hoxha presented himself as a

twentieth century Skanderbeg leading the Albanian people in a fight against imperialists. These are all examples of the kind of “invention of tradition” observed by Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983) and of elite-led construction of the narrative of the nation. The over-all picture is one of collective memory and national identity being constructed from the “top down” by powerful, if not always unified, elites. I turn next to the post-socialist era. I will examine the ways in which the Skanderbeg myth has been re-shaped in the post-socialist context, looking in particular at how the “democratisation of memory”, the opening up of Albania to flows of ideas and the dramatic post-socialist era change in Albania’s geo-political context have affected the way in which the myth of Skanderbeg has been represented.



### 5.3. Representations of Skanderbeg in Post-Socialist Albania

I have argued above that the myth of Skanderbeg has historically been presented to the Albanian people from the “top down” and at times in a quite didactic fashion, particularly during the state-socialist era. Following the end of state-socialist rule the Skanderbeg myth has not been dismissed as an element of previous regimes’ propaganda. On the contrary, it appears that the myth of Skanderbeg, like the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity, remains hugely popular. I will begin by evidencing the enduring popularity of Skanderbeg, referring both to significant events and to everyday practices. Perhaps the clearest indicator of the popularity of the Skanderbeg myth is the popular reaction to the temporary display, in Tirana, of Skanderbeg’s iconic helmet and sword.

In 2012, in order to celebrate the hundredth “birthday” of the Albanian nation-state, the Imperial Museum in Vienna lent Skanderbeg’s iconic sword and helmet to the National Historical Museum in Tirana. The reaction of the Albanian public demonstrated in a dramatic way the enduring popularity of the Albanian national hero. The website of the Albanian Ministry for Tourism reported “unbridled popularity”, noting that, “In order to accommodate the large crowds, the Museum stayed open for 36 hours in a row” (AADF: 2012). In January of 2013 the website added that “the National History Museum in Tirana claims that the exhibition was visited by an outstanding number of visitors, some 1,500,000 from Albania, Greece and Kosovo” (AADF, 2013). That many of the ethnically Albanian visitors had travelled from outside of the Albanian nation-state is significant. It indicates that Skanderbeg has become a symbol not just of the Albanian nation-state but of Albanian ethnicity more broadly.

Following the Kosovo crisis of the late 1990s, and the political reforms designed to prevent a similar crisis in Macedonia, newly empowered Albanians in those countries were keen to assert their Albanian identity. A tangible symbol of this empowerment was the placing of new statues of Skanderbeg in Pristina and Skopje. The statue of Skanderbeg which stands outside the Government and Kosovo Assembly Building in Pristina is a clear, and controversial, signal that Kosovo is, today, governed to a great extent by the Kosovar Albanian majority. An account, from an online blog, of the arrival of the statue into Pristina in 2001 gives an impression of what the occasion meant to many Kosovar Albanians;

“All that I can recall is the exaltation and delirium of the gathered mass [sic] with Skanderbeg’s statue. The statue of this Albanian hero had to travel from the Albanian city of Kruja up to the centre of Pristina. The journey lasted four days. The crowd, which was waiting for the statue, extended from the Albania-Kosovo border up to the centre of Pristina” (Kortun, 2004: online)

Andersen (2002:128), an anthropologist who witnessed the statues’ arrival, describes how, after half an hour of speeches there were “ritual sword fights” between actors dressed in traditional Albanian costumes, and then music late into the night. It was a celebration of, and affirmation of, the “Albanian-ness” of Kosovo. A statue of Skanderbeg which was placed in a largely Albanian neighbourhood of Skopje received a similarly jubilant welcome when unveiled in 2006. Ragaru (2008:522), a researcher who was present at the event, recalls;

“The seven-metre-high bronze statue is wrapped in a huge red Albanian flag bearing the black two-headed eagle. As the flag is slowly removed, an imposing equestrian representation emerges. The crowd cheers ...”

These occasions, which I refer to in order to demonstrate the enduring popularity of the Skanderbeg myth in the post-socialist era, are exceptional moments of heightened national fervour. I turn now from spectacular events involving Skanderbeg to the incorporation of the national hero as a symbol of “Albanian-ness” into everyday life. It is not to government sanctioned “official” uses of Skanderbeg that I wish to turn here, though evidence of such abounds. Rather it is the proliferation, in the post-socialist era, of *unofficial* uses of Skanderbeg and the “commodification” of Skanderbeg as a popular and saleable symbol of Albanian identity. A common sight as one travels around Albania is the yellow likeness of Skanderbeg’s distinctive helmet on *Kastrati* brand petrol stations (see figure 4.1). One can also find *Skenderbeu* brand [Skanderbeg] Cognac and *Skenderbeu* brand coffee in many shops and bars. Smaller businesses have also used the symbol of Skanderbeg, for example there is a Skanderbeg travel agency in central Tirana a few blocks from the National Historical Museum. As businesses such as Skanderbeg brand coffee and Kastrati Petrol have multiplied the number and variety of symbols of Skanderbeg encountered in everyday life this has added to the “matrix of images, ideas, spaces, things, discourses and practices” (Edensor, 2002: 17) which go to reproduce a sense of Albanian national identity.

Figure 5.1. Skanderbeg's helmet depicted at a Kastrati brand petrol station.



An important point I want to make here is that these uses of Skanderbeg as a symbol of Albanian identity and national pride are not elements of a state led nation-building project, of diktat “from above”. Rather they can be seen as examples what Edensor (1997:176) terms the “commodification of memory”. Those businesses which use Skanderbeg’s name and/or image are responding not to the demands of those at the apex of state power but rather to the popularity of Skanderbeg as a symbol of “Albanian-ness”. So too are the market stalls and shops in Tirana, Kruja and Lezhë which sell shot glasses, mugs, postcards, fridge magnets t-shirts, and other products emblazoned with Skanderbeg’s image as well as statuettes of the national hero (see figure 5.2). When such brands and souvenirs are created in response to popular demand “from below” as oppose to diktat “from above” they can be considered a facet of, and/or indicator of, the “democratisation of memory”. While, as Edensor (1997) points out, the “commodification of memories” can in some instances have a “dis-embedding” effect, in this instance it serves to “re-embed” Skanderbeg as a symbol of “Albanian-ness” in the home, on the shopping street, by the highway ... in short in places of everyday life.

The symbols and imagery of Skanderbeg discussed above have little if any narrative content in and of themselves. That the narrative content of the *myth* of Skanderbeg remains important to many people in Albania is evidenced by the reaction to a book; *Skanderbeg: ein Aufstand und sein Anführer* (Skanderbeg: an uprising and its leader) by Swiss historian Oliver Jens Schmidtt (1998). The publication of an Albanian language version of this ground-breaking evidence based reassessment of Skanderbeg’s life and deeds caused uproar in Albania during the late 1990s. As Elsie (2011: online) recalls;

“Schmitt’s discoveries shocked the Albanians, almost rocking the foundations of the Albanian state, and the debate that arose in the autumn of 2008, involved passionate arguments and counter-arguments in the media, the public, and even in the Albanian government”.

Both Schmidtt and his Albanian publishers received threats when this controversy was at its height (Andoni, 2018: online).

There was much in Schmidtt’s book which challenged the popular myth of Skanderbeg. One thing which many Albanians struggled to accept was Schmidtt’s insistence that

Figure 5.2. Skanderbeg figurines on sale in the market at Kruja



Skanderbeg's struggle against the Ottomans had had nothing to do with Albanian nationalism or national identity. Schmidtt states;

"On the whole, it is evident that the rebels [led by Skanderbeg] were not opposed by "foreign" invaders, but by local forces loyal to the ... [Ottoman] empire who were willing to fight members of their own ethnic groups longing for pre-Ottoman times. Many Albanians had good reason not to join the uprising. *The movement was not fostered by language or any feeling of belonging to an ethnic group*" [italics mine] (Schmidtt, 1998 translated by Elsie, 2011: online)

Even more difficult to accept for many Albanians was Schmidtt's suggestion that Skanderbeg's own ethnicity might be somewhat ambiguous or "hybrid". He writes;

"The Orthodox aristocracy in the Balkans [to which the Kastrioti family belonged] was so closely interrelated by marriage that it can be viewed as one group, united by its Byzantine heritage and Orthodox beliefs. Ethnic origin was of little significance when Greeks, southern Slavs and Albanians allied themselves with one another in marriage" (Schmidtt, 1998 translated by Elsie, 2011: online)

Most shocking of all for many Albanians – and this has to be understood in the context of the ethnic cleansing and conflict which had occurred in Kosovo in the late 1990s – was the suggestion that Skanderbeg might actually be part Serb. Schmidtt writes of the Kastrioti family;

"Relations had always been close to the Serb princely dynasty of the Brankovići. Blood ties seem to have existed since the time of Skanderbeg's father..." (Schmidtt, 1998 translated by Elsie, 2011: online)

In an interview with Ben Andoni, an Albanian journalist, Schmidtt denies that he set out to deconstruct the Skanderbeg myth, adding "How can one think that the years of scientific research have been devoted to the sole purpose of damaging the Albanian society?" (Schmidtt quoted in Andoni, 2018: online). Of course I do not believe that Schmidtt had any malicious intent whatsoever when writing about Skanderbeg, but the fact is he *did* deconstruct the Skanderbeg myth. Schmidtt's approach to researching and writing about Skanderbeg "dis-

embeds" (Giddens, 1991) the national hero. That is, by casting doubt on both Skanderbeg's ethnicity and his patriotism, Schmidtt in effect "dis-embeds" Skanderbeg from the nation.

Schmidtt (1998) does not just deconstruct the popular myth of Skanderbeg. He deconstructs the very idea of linear national continuity. In Schmidtt's (1998) telling, not only was Skanderbeg not fighting to defend the nation, there was no nation (at least no nation as it is understood today) to defend. It is a telling which steers the reader toward a modernist, constructivist view of nations and national identities, which disenchants myths of the nation and the nation itself and which exposes the constructed rather than organic nature of nations and national identities. Schmidtt (1998) has produced a work which is in effect anti-nationalist, whether or not that was his intention. If myths and memories are as central to nations and national identities as Smith (1996) believes then the deconstruction of national myths and memories can be seen as posing an existential threat to the nation itself. Indeed the popular reaction to Schmidtt's (1998) appears to indicate that it was seen as such by many Albanian people. It is not only Schmidtt (1998) who has deconstructed the Skanderbeg myth. Nor is it only academics from "the West" who do so. Piro Misha (2002:43), a prominent Albanian intellectual, states that;

"Skanderbeg was made a national hero although his action had never really involved all Albanians. Neither Kosovo nor most parts of the south [of Albania] were ever included".

This is a claim that is highly contentious amongst those Albanians in Kosovo and Southern Albania who consider Skanderbeg to be the most important symbol of *their* Albanian ethno-national identity.

A different kind of challenge to the Skanderbeg myth has come from the Turkish government. Omer Dincer, a Turkish politician who visited Kosovo in 2011, requested to Rame Buja, the Kosovar Minister of Education, that changes be made to the narrative of the Skanderbeg myth in textbooks used in Kosovar schools so that the Ottomans would be depicted in a more positive light. Buja agreed to form a special commission, to make changes and to implement them in 2012 (Haxhiu, 2011: online). This intervention was made at a time when Turkey was (and it still is) exerting "soft power" in the Western Balkan region (Hall and Brown, 2017). For the time being, though, most Albanians and all of the major political parties

in the country seem more inclined toward EU membership and a turn to “the West” than a return to a Turkish sphere of influence and there is little sign that popular understandings of the Skanderbeg myth have changed so as to reflect any new pro-Ottoman sentiment. Rather the popular myth of Skanderbeg is once again being used to flag Albania’s “European-ness”. Before going on to discuss the ways in which contemporary representations of Skanderbeg reflect this turn to Europe I want to briefly describe the context in which this is occurring.

According to a survey published in 2015 by the Open Society Foundation for Albania, an NGO, 91% of Albanians favour Albania’s membership of the European Union (EU) (Open Society Foundation for Albania, 2015). Furthermore, as Dobrushki (2017: online) points out, all of the major political parties in the country are “staunchly in favour of joining the EU”. But the likelihood of Albania’s admission to the EU is potentially diminished by, among other factors, the way in which Albania is “imagined” in “the West”. Muller (2003: online), a journalist, wryly observes that “There are viruses breeding in African rivers which have better public images than Albania” while Alpion (2005:20), an Albanian academic, writes of “the prevailing “heart of darkness” image Albania has in the West”. A number of representations of Albania, produced in “the West” for “Western” audiences, have portrayed Albania as being inherently “Oriental”; for example writings by Byron (1809), Disraeli (1885), Ryan (1939) and more recently Carver (1999). Carver writes, in his account of his travels in Albania, of his frequent attempts to convince the various Albanian people he meets that their country is essentially “Oriental” and “un-European”. Eventually he meets an individual who shares his opinion;

“Timo was the first Albanian I met who admitted freely that Albania was not a Western, a European country. “We are an Eastern country pretending to be a Western country. We had the Turks for 500 years and the communists for 50 years. Maybe in 550 years we could become Western. Maybe...”” (Carver, 1999:129)

Others, such as Samuel Huntington (2002) have represented Albania as being essentially “Islamic”, as discussed in section 2.5 of the literature review.

There has been debate within Albania about Albania’s “Eastern” or “Western” characteristics. Sulstarova (2012) identifies a popular post-socialist era discourse of Albania as a nation repeatedly denied its rightful place in Europe by despotic “oriental” regimes. This line of discourse contrasts periods of “Westernisation” and progress in Albania’s history -



Skanderbeg's resistance to the Ottomans, the *Rilindja Kombëtar* or "national renaissance" and the years of Zog's rule - with periods of "Easternisation" and stagnation - Ottoman rule and state-socialism (ibid). As well as being popular within Albania this kind of discourse is used to try to present Albania as being inherently "Western" to "the West", to counteract Orientalist imaginings of the country. Thus the myth of Skanderbeg has, once again, become useful as "proof" of Albania's essentially European nature just as it was in the early twentieth century.

So far in this section I have highlighted and evidenced the continuing popularity of the Skanderbeg myth in Albania as well as among the ethnic Albanian populations of Kosovo and Macedonia. I have also discussed some post-socialist era events and processes which have changed, or which potentially might change, the way Skanderbeg is imagined or understood in Albania. These were; the deconstruction of the Skanderbeg myth by the "Western" academic Oliver Jens Schmidtt, the call from Turkey to improve the image of the Ottomans in Kosovar school text books, and the turn to Europe and bid to join the European Union. Lastly I discussed the ambition of most Albanians and of all major Albanian political parties to join the EU, the way in which negative and Orientalist "imagined geographies" of Albania thwart this ambition, and the way in which the Skanderbeg myth can be used to promote the notion of Albania's inherent "European-ness".

Having discussed the context in which they exist I now describe and analyse continuities and changes in the narrative content of the two major Albanian museums at which Skanderbeg is represented. The museums in question are National Historical Museum (NHM) in Tirana and the Skanderbeg Museum in Kruja. Both of these museums are owned and funded by the Albanian state and both represent the "mainstream" and "official" narrative of the Skanderbeg myth. Both are popular tourist attractions, particularly so the Skanderbeg Museum. I will begin at the NHM.

In the National Historical Museum (NHM), the life and times of Skanderbeg are represented in the Pavilion of the Middle-Ages. As mentioned in the previous chapter on the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity the NHM is arranged chronologically so as to present a linear history of the Albanian nation. The Pavilion of the Middle-Ages follows directly from the pavilions of ancient history in which the theory of Illyrian-Albanian continuity is advanced. About half of the Pavilion of the Middle-Ages is given over to an exhibition about the national hero. There are few authentic artefacts dating from the time of Skanderbeg in the museum's

collection – or in existence - but, of course, the life and times of Albania’s national hero has to be represented. To this end a number of objects created during the state-socialist era are on display. These include a bronze sculpture of the national hero and soapstone models of strategically important castles used during the conflict with the Ottoman Empire. A large state-socialist era mural of Skanderbeg and his army covers one wall. The mural and the objects of state-socialist provenance reflect the state-socialist era narrative of “fortress Albania”. The information panels, however, are post-socialist additions which give a “reformed” narrative. After explaining Skanderbeg’s role in the formation of the League of Lezhë the main information panel on Skanderbeg states;

“This union then presented the most opponent state against the Ottomans [sic]. It was clear that the Ottoman Empire threatened to occupy all of Europe. Skanderbeg sought the support of the European countries by taking part in a war against the common enemy” (Information panel in National Historical Museum last viewed on 17/10/2015)

By stressing the fact that the Ottoman Empire threatened “all of Europe” and that Skanderbeg and his army fought on the side of Europe “against the common enemy” the curators place Skanderbeg and the Albanian people on the European side of an imagined civilizational divide. The panel continues;

“Skanderbeg, like very few around the world, was honoured as a National Hero during his lifetime, due to his large contribution to the *national and European history...*” (Information Panel in NHM, last viewed on 17/10/2015)

Here Skanderbeg’s status as national hero is affirmed. But he is also presented as a *European* hero. Once again the Skanderbeg myth is presented as evidence of Albania’s historical “place in Europe”. This emphasis on Skanderbeg’s – and by extension Albania’s - “European credentials” is also in evidence at the Skanderbeg Museum in Kruja.

The Skanderbeg Museum was opened in 1982, at a time when the state-socialist government was investing a great deal of money in new sites of memory in order to promote a strong sense of national identity and national purpose. The museum was designed to bolster the regime’s narrative of a besieged “fortress Albania” and this is still apparent today as the narrative was incorporated into the fabric of the museum; in stained glass windows,

sculptures, friezes, murals (one of which is reputed to be the largest mural in the Balkan region) and the castle-like design of the building itself. As at the NHM, though, new information panels give the socialist era displays a new spin. One of these, an introductory panel in the entrance hall, states;

“This museum is dedicated to the heroic struggle of the Albanian people in the fifteenth century. This struggle against Ottoman invasion was led by our national hero Skanderbeg ... different original objects and reproductions, the sculptures, the reliefs, all the halls of the museum expose the virtues of Skanderbeg as an organiser, as a statesman, as a political strategist and as a defender of European civilisation” (Information panel at the Skanderbeg Museum, last viewed 21/04/2015)

Here again Skanderbeg is presented as a saviour of Europe. Importantly, though, so are “the Albanian people”. Skanderbeg’s role in saving Europe from Ottoman rule is also stressed on the English language guided tour of the Skanderbeg Museum. I witnessed a tour guide interpreting the Skanderbeg Museum guide to a group of English tourists (who I was allowed to accompany). During this tour the guide described Skanderbeg as “a saviour of Europe and of Christianity”. Skanderbeg’s links with Venice and Rome were emphasised by the tour guide, as was the esteem in which he was once held in Western Europe (Guided tour: 05/06/2013).

It appears then that those museums which represent Skanderbeg have, during the post-socialist era, highlighted a-new Skanderbeg’s reputed role as a saviour of Europe. As previously mentioned Albania has something of an “image problem” in “the West”. At the NHM and the Skanderbeg Museum the national hero is being used to change the way “Western” tourists think about and “imagine” Albania. The NHM and the Skanderbeg Museum, and the “performances” which take place there, are examples of what Hall (2017: 3) calls the “tourism-geopolitics nexus”.

While I have, so far, focused on areas of post-socialist change in the NHM and Skanderbeg Museum it is important to point out that in many ways the myth of Skanderbeg told at these sites today is the same as that told in the era of state-socialism, and for that matter the same as that popularised in Albania in the late nineteenth and early-mid twentieth century. The findings of Schmidt’s (1998) ground-breaking research into Skanderbeg’s life

and legacy are conspicuously absent from the narrative content of the two museums. For example, while Schmidt (1998) considers the conflicts in which Skanderbeg became embroiled to have been, to a large extent, fought between rival Albanian factions both museums depict Skanderbeg's struggle as being a straightforwardly patriotic war of Albanians against Ottoman invaders. The introductory panel at the Skanderbeg Museum states unequivocally that Skanderbeg was "*honoured as a National Hero during his lifetime*" [italics mine] (Information panel at the Skanderbeg Museum, last viewed 21/10/2015).

The continued representation of the *popular myth* of Skanderbeg at the NHM and Skanderbeg Museum, rather than a less popular but more historically verifiable narrative, seems to evidence Palmer's (1999) point; that when memory is "democratised" and government funding for museums and heritage sites is cut – as has occurred in Albania in the post-socialist era - museums and heritage sites resort to populism in order to maintain relevance and visitor numbers. In such circumstances, she argues, the stories told at heritage sites and museums tend to be told in "a particular type of language, designed to create an image of nation-ness" and to be "exciting, glamorous, [and] able to fill people's hearts with a glow of national pride" (Palmer, 1999:319). If the Skanderbeg Museum were to replace its current narrative content with a new, more historically verifiable and less populist narrative of Skanderbeg's life and deeds – based, perhaps on the findings of Schmidt's (1998) research - I doubt that the museum would remain as profoundly meaningful to Albanian visitors as it is in its current form. In fact, given popular reaction to Schmidt's (1998) book, it seems likely that this would result in a public outcry. The NHM and the Skanderbeg Museum tell the story which a majority of Albanians wish to be told. It is apparent that, in this instance, the "democratisation of memory" has not resulted in the assertion of "counter-memory" (Legg, 2005) "from below" or in the fragmenting of the dominant narrative. Rather popular conservatism regarding the myth of Skanderbeg, widespread emotional attachment to the dominant narrative of the myth and a resistance to major re-assessment and change, has given the museum curators at the NHM and Skanderbeg Museum every reason *not* to change the way they represent Albania's national hero other than to re-assert his role as saviour of Western Europe.

As mentioned previously, the Skanderbeg Museum is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Albania. Though the guide could not provide figures he believed it likely to be

either the most popular tourist attraction in Albania or second only to Butrint (Skanderbeg Museum guide, interviewed 05/06/2013). It was also apparent during each of three visits I made to the museum that it was frequently visited by school parties. The guide estimated that fifty percent of visitors to the museum were school parties from across Albania and from Kosovo, noting;

“It is part of their education to learn about their national heritage. And this is especially important to the Kosovar Albanians who had their culture repressed. There are over one million Albanians in Kosovo [in fact there are around 2 million] and Skanderbeg is a very important part of their heritage, so many come here ... families on their vacations as well as schools” (Skanderbeg Museum guide, interviewed 05/06/2013)

Hall (2017: 324) reports that “In 2010, 1.18 million Kosovars were recorded entering Albania” and that;

“This figure rose to 1.71 million in 2012, fell back in 2013, before rising to 1.38 million in 2014, representing a market share of 37.55% [of tourist visits to Albania]” (ibid).

This is significant geopolitically as well as economically. The NHM and even more so the hugely popular Skanderbeg Museum potentially help to construct an “imagined community” (Anderson: 1983) of ethnic Albanians which extends beyond the borders of the Albanian nation-state. The Skanderbeg myth is a “common denominator” of this “imagined community” (ibid), a story which all Albanians across the region know, and most hold dear. The experience of visiting the Skanderbeg Museum may be a “common denominator” for many as well. As the museum guide told me;

“Most Albanians will visit the Skanderbeg Museum at least once in their life”  
(Skanderbeg Museum guide, interviewed 05/06/2013)

Arguably, for many Albanians a visit to the Skanderbeg Museum is a kind of secular pilgrimage and the museum itself a “shrine” at which Albanians celebrate their shared ethnic/national identity and pay homage to their national hero. For many Albanians the myth of Skanderbeg appears to have become almost sacred.

#### 5.4. Conclusions

I have argued that the myth of Skanderbeg has remained hugely popular in the post-socialist era amongst those who identify themselves as being ethnically Albanian. This is evidenced by the use of Skanderbeg as a saleable symbol of “Albanian-ness” by Albanian businesses such as Skanderbeg coffee. It is also evidenced by the popularity of Skanderbeg-related tourist attractions. The many tourists who flock to the Skanderbeg Museum from all across Albania and from Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro and beyond do so of their own volition (except perhaps for some children on school trips). So did the 1,500,000 people who visited the NHM to see Skanderbeg’s sword and helmet when they were loaned to that museum in 2012. These high visitor numbers are an indicator of, and result of, the myth’s remarkable popularity. Furthermore, as these visitors are, in effect, “voting with their feet” this is evidence of the “democratisation of memory”. The myth is reinforced and reproduced by these “secular pilgrimages”, and so is a sense of shared Albanian identity.

The way in which the myth of Skanderbeg is represented at the state-owned museums, the National Historical Museum and the Skanderbeg Museum, has changed little since the era of state-socialism other than the re-emphasising of certain aspects of the myth which serve to flag Albania’s “European-ness”. It is a telling of the myth which has Skanderbeg uniting the Albanian people against a foreign foe – the Ottomans – and doing so in order to defend the integrity and freedom of the nation. This continuity of narrative content from state-socialist era into post socialist era does not reflect a lack of responsiveness and accountability to “the people” on the part of the curators at those museums. On the contrary, it is in line with the popular will. The passionate popular reaction against the publication, in Albanian, of Swiss historian Oliver Schmidt’s (1998) evidence based re-assessment of Skanderbeg’s life and legacy indicates the existence of a kind of conservative patriotism regarding the myth of the national hero amongst a significant proportion of the Albanian population. The Skanderbeg Museum and the NHM represent and reproduce the popular myth which many Albanian people wished to defend, which has become an almost sacred facet of Albanian national identity. They reproduce and bolster the myth by providing a heightened experience of connection with the “nation’s” past and by representing the myth in an authoritative way. And at the same time the enduring popularity of the myth amongst “the people” gives the museums their continuing relevance and *raison d’etre*.

The main theoretical point which can be drawn from all this is that the “democratisation of memory” does not necessarily bring change to myths of national identity. Nor does it necessarily result in the fragmentation of national identities and national narratives as MacDonald (2003) and Ames (2004) have suggested. The (re)construction of the myth of Skanderbeg at the NHM and Skanderbeg Museum is an example of the kind of demand led populism described by Palmer (1999). Representations of Skanderbeg at the NHM and, even more so, the Skanderbeg Museum are indeed “exciting, glamorous, [and] able to fill people’s hearts with a glow of national pride” (Palmer, 1999:319). And this emotionally engaging representation of the myth re-affirms and reproduces it anew. Thus in this instance the “democratisation of memory”, reproduces the popular myth of Skanderbeg at the two museums examined and analysed. In fact the power of the NHM and Skanderbeg Museum to reproduce the Skanderbeg myth has arguably increased during the post-socialist era as ethnic-Albanians from out-with Albania – from Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro – can now visit these “shrines” to *their* national hero. Today the two museums are places at which a regional cross-border “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983) of ethnic-Albanians is (re)constructed.

The use of Skanderbeg as a symbol of “Albanian-ness” by various businesses marks out the distinctive “Albanian-ness” of those places where they are encountered. These are “banal” (Billig, 1995) everyday reminders of Skanderbeg as symbol-of-the-nation which add to the “matrix” (Edensor, 2002: 17) of signs and symbols of Albanian national identity encountered in everyday life. They may, like Billig’s (1995) “un-waved flag”, barely be registered by those who encounter them on a daily basis, but like the “un-waved flag” (ibid) they are powerful in their ubiquity, and they mark out not only the distinctive “Albanian-ness” of every-day places but also Skanderbeg’s continuing “role” as *the* key symbol of Albanian identity.

The other theoretical point which can be drawn from this chapter addresses the relationship between myths of national identity, the way in which they are narrated and (re)constructed at museums and heritage sites, and contemporary geo-politics. As noted above, the only significant change in the way in which the myth of Skanderbeg is narrated at the NHM and the Skanderbeg Museum during the post-socialist era is a change in emphasis on some aspects of the myth which has been effected in order to provide evidence of

Albania's "European-ness". In particular Skanderbeg is represented as having saved Western Europe from Ottoman invasion. Key to understanding this change in narrative is the changing geo-political context in which this has taken place. While in the state-socialist era, the era in which both the NHM and the Skanderbeg Museum were constructed, "the West" was represented in official discourse as an enemy, in the post-socialist era "the West" has been officially represented and widely perceived as being where Albania "belongs". All major political parties in Albania, and most of the population, wish their country to become part of the European Union. Outside of Albania, however, and particularly in "the West", perceptions and "imagined geographies" of Albania have tended to be persistently negative and "Orientalist" (Said, 1978) and this perception of Albania's "un-European-ness" arguably decreases the country's chance of accession to the EU.

At the same time as they have (re)constructed and bolstered facets of Albanian national identity by representing the Albanian nation to the Albanian people during the post-socialist era the NHM and Skanderbeg Museum have represented facets of Albanian history and identity to foreign tourists. As a significant and increasing number of these tourists are from "the West" the two museums have an opportunity to represent Albania in a positive way and to change widely held perceptions about the country. In the post-socialist era the myth of Skanderbeg has become a historical asset to be used for geo-political purposes much as it was in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While those changes in narrative which reposition Skanderbeg as a saviour of Europe can be understood as part of an effort to change perceptions of Albania abroad they can also be understood as being part of the populist narrative of the museums.



## **6.0. Myths and Memories of Enver Hoxha and Albania's State-Socialist Past:**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I focus on representations of, and heritage sites related to, the dictator Enver Hoxha and the state-socialist regime which he headed as First Secretary of the Party of Labour of Albania between 1944 and his death in 1985. As a symbol of the state-socialist era Hoxha is a divisive figure in post-socialist Albania. Representations of the dictator and the era of his rule have become central to a politicised “culture war”, to use Davison Hunter’s (1992) phrase, and are hotly contested. Because of this, “places of memory” associated with Hoxha are almost invariably places of contested memory. Some are places of “official” state-sanctioned memory and some are places of “counter-memory” (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015). Through an examination and comparison of various different museums and heritage sites at which Hoxha and/or the era of state socialism are, or have been, represented I will investigate further the processes of the “democratisation of memory” and the “dis-embedding” and “re-embedding” of memory.

After a brief account of the construction of the personality cult of Enver Hoxha and a brief assessment of the achievements, crimes and overall legacy of the state-socialist regime I will go on to describe the politicisation of “myths” and “memories” of Hoxha in the post-socialist era. Having given some explanation of the political context in which they exist I then focus on selected museums and heritage sites at which Hoxha and/or the Hoxha era are represented. These are the state funded and run National Historical Museum, the Pogradec Museum, the NGO funded Gjirokastër Museum, the private collections of Elton Caushi and Kristaq Cullufe, and the semi-derelict but still iconic Tirana Pyramid. I will argue that the “official” state funded “anti-communist” representation of the state-socialist era in the National Historical Museum betrays the – in some ways - “illiberal” nature of democracy in Albania, but will then go on to argue that, despite the illiberal nature of the democratic process in Albania, there is evidence of the democratisation of memory to be found at the NGO funded and small private museums as well as, most dramatically and significantly, at the Tirana Pyramid. I will also argue that this particular instance of the “democratisation of memory”, in contrast to those discussed in the previous two chapters, is similar to that process described by Atkinson as it involves the challenging and undermining of “official” discourse “from below”. The overall picture produced by my findings and analysis is one of a

government constructing an “anti-communist” discourse and of various individuals maintaining places of alternative, not pro-communist but more nuanced, “counter-memory” (Legg, 2005; Light and Young, 2015). I begin with a short account of Enver Hoxha’s political life, of the nature of the personality cult that was constructed around him, and of the legacy of his rule.

### 6.1. A Brief History of Enver Hoxha's Political Life and Personality Cult

Enver Hoxha was born in 1908 to a middle class, land-owning, Muslim family in the town of Gjirokaštër in southern Albania. He attended school in Gjirokaštër, then went on to study at the French Lycee in Korça, another southern Albanian town, where he graduated in 1930 with, it is said, “a brilliant record and a good foundation in the humanities” (Halliday, 1986: 2, Gloyer, 2012: 232). Having graduated with distinction Hoxha was awarded a state scholarship to attend the University of Montpellier. It was during his time in France that he met Ali Kelmendi, a leading light in Albania's small communist movement, and developed an interest in left wing politics. He wrote some articles criticising King Zog's Albanian government which were published in *L'Humanité*, the French communist Party newspaper, and as a consequence of this he lost his state scholarship. After unsuccessful attempts at working and studying in Paris and Brussels Hoxha returned to Albania and found work teaching at his old school, the French Lycee, in Korça (Halliday, 1986: 3). While teaching in Korça he helped to organise a local communist group.

Enver Hoxha's serious role in the Partisan resistance movement began in 1939 when he moved to Tirana after having been fired from his teaching job. In Tirana he ran a small tobacco/book shop owned by his uncle and, secretly, helped organise the fledgling communist movement in Albania's capital (Halliday, 1986). At this time agents of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia were working to amalgamate the various disorganised local communist movements that then existed in Albania into one single and more effective one. Under Yugoslavian tutelage a unified Albanian Communist Party was officially formed on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1941 (Vickers, 1999). Enver Hoxha was selected to head this amalgamated organisation, going on to become Party Secretary. He would remain at the head of the Albanian Communist Party – later re-named the Party of Labour of Albania - until his death in 1985.

There were three competing political factions in Albania during the Second World War. These were the centre-right republican *Balli Kombëtar*, the right wing, pro-King-Zog, *Legaliteti* and the communist *Partisans*. The more right-wing factions were generally stronger in the north of the country while the Partisans had more support in the south; a political polarisation which persists to some degree today. In 1942 the Nationalists and Partisans agreed, at a secret

conference in the central Albanian village of Peza, to unite against foreign occupation, forming the National Liberation Movement. In 1944, however, the Partisans resolved to break with the rightist organisations and to fight for total control of the state. This was officially declared on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1944 at the Congress of Permet where a Provisional Government, with Hoxha as head of state, was elected by representatives of the Albanian Communist Party. After the Congress of Permet the Second World War became, in Albania, as much a civil war between the Partisans and the right-wing organisations as a war of liberation from foreign forces. The Partisans proved to be the more organised and efficient force. On 17<sup>th</sup> November 1944 the Partisans liberated Tirana, but the north of the country, where the rightist factions had most support, remained outside the Partisans control. Shkodër, the main city of north Albania, finally fell to Hoxha's forces on November 29<sup>th</sup> and then, with all of the country "liberated", the task of consolidating state-socialist rule began (Vickers, 1999). This involved the imprisonment and execution of thousands of people who had fought for the Nationalist factions or who had collaborated with the Italians or Germans; in parts of northern Albania the male population was decimated (Grigorov, 2003, Hall, 1994, Vickers, 1999).

Hoxha's 40 years as head of state and dictator were marked by a series of breaks with important allies – first with Yugoslavia, then with the Soviet Union and finally with China. After each of these breaks the regime became more isolationist and its propaganda more alarmist, xenophobic and nationalist. At the same time the regime promoted ever more fervently the personality cult of Enver Hoxha. Standish (2002: 116) writes that "Enver Hoxha was the principle subject of socialist Albanian myth-making – as well as being himself the principle myth-maker". Some observers have noted that, at a time when the regime was eliminating religion from Albania, Hoxha's personality cult came to seem like a new or surrogate religion. Schwandner-Seivers (2002: 23) suggests that "the introduction of the messianic myths of Hoxha's heroism, sacrifice and his qualities as a founding father of the nation, with their sacral character served as a substitute religion while, at the same time, atheism was imposed", while Zickel and Iwaskiw (1999: 38) state that "Hoxha engineered an elaborate cult of personality whose spokesmen elevated his persona to the status of a god-man" (Zickel and Iwaskiw, 1994:38).

Various places associated with the life and deeds of Hoxha were valorised as heritage sites; the house in Gjirokastër where he was born (or, following a fire in the 1960s, a replica

of the house) became a museum, as did the “House Where Enver Hoxha Lived” in Korça and the “House of the Party” where he held secret meetings of the communist organisation in Tirana. At the House of the Party Museum the story of Hoxha’s role in building the New Albania was told. The state-socialist era museum guide-book tells the visitor;

“Every object in this house has its history. It was around these tables that many a long debate went on until late into the night. It was here that the happy future of our people was outlined. Everything here is linked with the name of Comrade Enver Hoxha. There is his photograph on the wall. Supported by the majority of the participants in the meeting, he rejected the theses of the Trotskyite elements and proved with scientific argument the necessity of the creation of the Communist Party and the revolution, which would lead the Albanian people to victory against the external and internal enemies” (Anon, 1981: 27)

The guide book goes on to describe, in idealized terms, how the museum was used;

“People of different ages and walks of life visit this house every day. They are interested in everything, even the smallest details. School pupils come here to concretize their lessons, pioneer and youth organizations hold meetings and even admit their new members in this house. And when they leave they always recall this small house connected with the great event of November 8, 1941 [the official date of the formation of the Communist Party of Albania which later became the Party of Labour]” (Anon, 1981: 51)

After Chairman Mao’s death in 1976, and the cooling of Chinese-Albanian relations that followed, Chinese financial aid to Albania was cut and, as Vickers (1995:203) puts it, “Albania was reduced to a degree of self-imposed ideological and political isolation for which there is hardly any modern parallel”. Despite the increasingly desperate state of the country’s finances, the Albanian government splurged money on museums which were designed for the “patriotic education” of the Albanian people. Among these were the National Historical Museum and the pyramidal Museum of Enver Hoxha (now called the Tirana Pyramid or *Pyramida*) situated in central Tirana (Hall, 1994: 37).

Hoxha’s health deteriorated in the 1980s and on the 12<sup>th</sup> April 1985 he died of natural causes. The personality cult built around Hoxha seems to have, if anything, grown in the years

immediately following his death. In 1986 Foto Cami, the First Party Secretary of the city of Tirana, wrote the following;

“This year we shall celebrate the 45th anniversary of the founding of our beloved Party. We shall have Comrade Enver Hoxha there, too, because he is and will always be present in all our festivities, in every congress of the Party, as he is and will always be present in everything that is built and created in the new socialist Albania of which he is the architect. Enver Hoxha will live forever in the hearts and the work of the Albanian people for the socialist construction of the country. The new Albania and Comrade Enver Hoxha are one and indivisible, so his name and Work will live in the centuries” (Cami, 1986: 6)

In 1988 Ramiz Alia, Hoxha’s successor as head of state, published a book entitled “Our Enver” which built upon Hoxha’s own numerous publications of political thought and memoirs. In the concluding paragraph of Alia’s book Hoxha is not only presented as national hero but as a kind of secular messiah;

“The epochs give birth to leaders such as Enver Hoxha and they have epoch making dimensions. Just as historical epochs are never forgotten, so their heroes survive, are honoured and respected for ever ... With his majestic work Enver Hoxha will always be present in the joys and worries of our society. The present and future generations will be guided by his teachings. Facing any major problem, facing any difficulty or obstacle, they will seek the advice of Enver. And Enver will help them. He will give them answers through his work” (Alia, 1988 quoted in Standish, 2002:122)

Vickers and Pettifer (2000:17) describe how, in the years following his death;

“The Shadow of Enver Hoxha was everywhere, on huge billboards by the side of the road, with endless slogans painted on buildings and even on the dramatic and beautiful mountains, where Young Pioneers had to carry stones to make “Enver” patterns in 30-foot letters thousands of feet above sea level on grassy slopes”.

These slogans and billboards, along with the numerous statues, busts and portraits, the museums and heritage sites, the books written by Hoxha which were required reading and

the quotes of Hoxha's words which prefaced every book were all-pervasive symbols of Hoxha and his achievements. Before moving on to discuss the contestation and politicisation of Hoxha's legacy in the post-socialist era I will discuss, in brief, what that legacy was, the positives and negatives which have made him so divisive a historical figure.

Vickers and Pettifer (2000: 10) point out that, while Hoxha is reviled by many, and with good reason, "it was he who had put Albania on the map as a modern industrial country in contrast to the near medieval conditions prevailing at the time of the Axis occupation". Elsewhere Vickers (1999:193) writes of rapid economic growth and of "a transformation in literacy, health, education and general living standards" during the state-socialist era". Shortly after Hoxha's death Artisien (1986:161) observed;

"Hoxha's modernisation efforts, implemented under a strictly Stalinist system, stimulated impressive economic progress: Industrial production in post war years has increased more than 150 times and agricultural production has quintupled"

Against these achievements, however, there are horrific state-sanctioned crimes which cannot be ignored. According to Hall (1994:57);

"Between 1945 and 1955 an estimated 80,000 political arrests were made (out of a population of less than two million), of whom 16,000 died in prison"

Tarifa (1994) believes that some 4500-5000 people were imprisoned by the regime every year during the state-socialist era. The "crimes" committed by those sent to prison could be disturbingly inane. As individual examples are often more telling than numbers I will give just one; the story of Ali Oseku, which was reported in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1991. Ali Oseku was a set designer for the Tirana Opera during Hoxha's time in power. He was talented and well respected and had won prizes for his "high revolutionary spirit". In 1972, however, Oseku incurred the wrath of the increasingly paranoid regime. His "crime" was to have displayed foreign influences in his backdrop for a production of *"La Traviata"*. He was accused of having been influenced by Picasso, ordered "to get to know the reality of the worker" and sentenced to hard labour (Williams, 1991: online).

This, then, is the legacy of Hoxha and the regime he oversaw for most of its existence; the development of the country, the lifting of most of the population out of abject poverty,

dramatic improvements in education, health care and infrastructure, but also for many thousands of people the nightmare of inhumane and draconian punishment and for many more the constant fear of capricious state officials.



## 6.2 Representations of Enver Hoxha and State-Socialism in Post-Socialist Albania

In the post-socialist era the legacy of Enver Hoxha and his regime has become hotly contested and politicised. Many of the places associated with Hoxha and with state-socialism have become places of contested memory. Historical accounts of the final days of state-socialism in Albania describe the ways in which places and objects of memory symbolic of the socialist regime were targeted for equally symbolic attacks. Vickers and Pettifer (1997:49) recount dramatic scenes witnessed in Tirana in February 1991;

“...demonstrators continued ... publicly burning the works of Enver Hoxha. Their pages littered the streets surrounding Skanderbeg Square and in one corner a huge bonfire engulfed a seemingly unending supply of the dictator’s portraits and writings ... The “Flora” bookshop ... where Hoxha had worked as an underground communist organiser before the war was reduced to ashes”.

Abrahams (2015:83) provides an equally vivid account of what was perhaps the most powerfully symbolic moment of those heady days, the toppling of Enver Hoxha’s statue in Tirana;

“...the crowd in Skanderbeg Square tied the cable around Hoxha’s neck and dragged the hollow statue off with a truck. People rode the body up the boulevard like a bronco until it broke in two. People spit on the pieces, and one man took a piss”.

Not all Albanians were of one mind about the legacy of Hoxha’s regime however. Vickers and Pettifer (1997:49) recall that the day after the destruction of state-socialist heritage in Tirana “a group of officers loyal to Hoxha established a “Commission for the Defence of the Homeland” and demanded that the statue of their hero be re-erected”. They add that “In traditional Hoxhaist centres ... [in southern Albania] groups of “Enverist Volunteers” took oaths of loyalty before the national flag and fired shots in the air” (ibid). As it became increasingly clear that totalitarian rule could not be sustained those in positions of power and authority began to position themselves politically and to construct political narratives in preparation for the advent of multi-party democracy (Abrahams, 2015).

During the late 1990s Vickers and Pettifer (1997:8) claimed that, just as under Albania's state-socialist regime "historical reality was falsified and distorted ... the overthrow of communism is being subjected to similar patterns of distortion". They went on to express particular concern about the presentation of history in Albanian school textbooks at the time;

"The historical account that has appeared in Albania, in the school textbook *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, has disturbing parallels with some of the socialist historiography it was supposed to supplant; it is subjective and focuses almost exclusively on the alleged role of Dr Sali Berisha [President of Albania from 1991 – 1997, Prime minister 2005 - 2013] in the dramatic events which led to the DP's [Democratic Party's] victory in March 1992" (Vickers and Pettifer, 1997:9)

Later in their detailed account of political and social change in 1990s Albania Vickers and Pettifer (1997) turn to the Albanian media. Soon after the fall of the socialist regime, they write, "authoritarian tendencies began to reappear in the media, aimed at reinforcing the exclusive power of the President" (Vickers and Pettifer, 1997:89). In this climate, they add, "questioning the government line was heresy, and anyone who criticised policy had to be a "communist"" (Vickers and Pettifer, 1997:90). Accounts of observers such as Vickers and Pettifer (1997), Abrahams (2015) and Tarifa and Weinstein (1995) suggest that by the mid-1990s Albania had, in some respects, become an example of what Mounk (2018) calls an "illiberal democracy".

President Berisha had, like many of those occupying positions of power in the self-styled "anti-communist" Democratic Party, been a member of the communist Party of Labour during Albania's era of state-socialism. Abrahams (2015:92) notes that Berisha had, in fact, "kept his Party of Labour membership until February 1991". Despite this, adds Abrahams (ibid), "By 1992, he spouted anti-communism with a vicious snarl" and "used the spectre of communism to silence dissent". The instrumentalist use of anti-communist rhetoric was stepped up during the run-up to a general election in 1996. It was at this time that the controversial "Genocide Law" was introduced. This new law, according to Vickers (1999:242), "was designed to bring about a sharp depletion of the ranks of the opposition parties by prohibiting anyone who had held a position of power before 31st March 1991, under the old communist regime, from holding any parliamentary, judicial or governmental office". According to Tarifa and

Weinstein (1995:70), however, this campaign of lustration was not limited to those who had been in positions of power;

“...tens of thousands of people, most members or supporters of the SP [Socialist Party – the reformed and renamed Party of Labour] but otherwise ordinary citizens who had never enjoyed any economic or other sort of privilege under Hoxha’s reign, were dismissed from their jobs merely for their party affiliation and political convictions”.

There was a geographical dimension to this campaign. Towns, villages and even entire regions which had been particularly supportive of Hoxha, and which remained loyal to the Socialist Party, were allegedly punished by Berisha’s regime through lack of funding from central government. For example Tarrifa (1994:64) writes that the Democratic Party;

“...intimidated the entire populace of Skrapari district [a poor mountainous region of southern Albania], declaring that the democratic government would not help them because they did not vote for the Democratic Party”.

While official narratives about Albania’s state-socialist past have until recently been typically “anti-communist” a recent OSCE report on Albanian people’s understandings and opinions of their country’s past has revealed both division and ambivalence about the state-socialist era. Summarising the results of a questionnaire survey of 995 Albanian citizens the report states that “The perception of life under communism is [] not uniform” but also that “the majority of people felt that at least some aspects of life were better under the regime, such as safety, education and employment” (OSCE, 2016:76). Noting the gap between official narratives of Albania’s state-socialist era and commonly held memories and perceptions of that time the report calls for a more “nuanced and inclusive approach to the work of dealing with Albania’s Communist past”. This apparent mismatch between official representations of the era of state-socialism on the one hand and the memories, or “counter-memories” (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015) of much of the Albanian population on the other provides a contrast with those facets of Albanian myth and memory discussed in the previous two chapters. While “official” discourse on the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the myth of Skanderbeg is popular (and/or populist) and rarely challenged from within Albania, “official” discourse on Albania’s state-socialist past is divisive and contested. This, as I will argue below, results in a

very different kind of “democratisation of memory” to that discussed in chapters 4 and 5. The process of the “democratisation of memory described in this chapter is much more similar to that described by Atkinson (2008).

In 2013, during the course of my research, another general election took place. The Democratic Party was defeated by the Socialist Party and Edi Rama replaced Sali Berisha as Prime Minister of Albania. My field research took place immediately before this election and in the two years afterward and my thesis reflects this political context. Social and political change which has occurred after 2015 is not discussed here in depth as I have not had an opportunity to carry out field work since 2015. I begin with what was, at the time of the 2013 general election, the only major “official” representation of the state-socialist era in any fully state-funded museum in Albania; the Pavilion of Communist Terror in the National Historical Museum.

The National Historical Museum (NHM), Albania’s largest and most important museum, opened in 1981. The late 1970s and early 1980s were years during which Albania’s state socialist regime was at its most stridently nationalist and isolationist, and also the years in which investment in new museums was at its peak. As mentioned in the previous two chapters the NHM presented – and still presents - Albanian history in a series of chronologically ordered pavilions. During the state socialist era the narrative culminated in a large gallery celebrating the achievements of Enver Hoxha and the Party of Labour (Ward, 1988). In 1990, after the fall of the state-socialist regime the exhibits which lauded Enver Hoxha and the Party of Labour were removed to storage in the museum basement (Ruoss, 2010). An exhibition on the crimes of the state-socialist regime was opened in the “final” gallery in 1996 (communistcrimes.org: 25/04/2012). This was closed in 2011 and the current “Pavilion of Communist Terror” opened on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2012. It is this current version of the Pavilion which I visited during the course of my fieldwork and which I analyse here.

The date chosen for the opening of the Pavilion – February 20<sup>th</sup> 2012 - was significant. It was on February 20<sup>th</sup> in 2001 that the statue of Enver Hoxha which had stood just outside the museum entrance in Tirana’s main square was pulled down by an angry crowd; an event which marks a symbolic end to the state-socialist regime’s hold on power. There is, arguably, a second reason why the timing was significant. The incumbent Democratic Party was preparing for a general election in June 2013 and their main adversary was the Socialist Party,

the centre-left party which had evolved out of the once Stalinist Party of Labour. Attendance at the official opening of the Pavilion was limited to politicians, including Prime Minister Sali Berisha, a group of individuals who had been persecuted by the state-socialist regime and the families of victims of the regime. Berisha declared, during his speech at the opening ceremony;

“Europe has known many dictators and dictatorships in its history. But it has registered in its memory two of the cruellest dictators of all time – Adolph Hitler and Enver Hoxha” (Top-Channel, 2012: online)

Luan Malltezi, then the director of the NHM, was a little more measured;

“The Pavilion shows with facts that Albania was a country which lived with terror under Enver Hoxha’s regime” (Malltezi quoted by Top-Channel, 2012: online).

The displays in the Pavilion of Communist Terror highlight the crimes of Hoxha’s regime in a very effective and powerful way. I will describe and analyse my own experience as a tourist/researcher on my first visit to the museum in June 2013 drawing on an auto-ethnographic account I made at the time. On entering the Pavilion of Communist Terror in 2013 I was struck right away by the ambiance. Subdued lighting and the use of dark colours, grey and black, creates a sombre, austere feel which is distinct from that of the rest of the museum. The information panels have white text on a black background and the photographs - even those taken as recently as the early 1990s - are black and white. Visitors typically move around the space in silence or speak in hushed tones. It felt more like a memorial than a typical museum.

The display cabinets are arranged in chronological order so that as one proceeds anti-clockwise round the room one moves from the period immediately following the Second World War toward the fall of the regime in 1991, encountering a relentless litany of crimes and horrors as one progresses. The cabinets are also divided according to particular themes such as religious persecution, persecuted artists and writers and so forth. One contains a selection of items used by prison guards; chains, truncheons and the like. Others contain objects which belonged to individuals executed by the regime. Labels relating to these read, for example, “Koco Plaku’s hammer, engineering geologist, executed 1976”, “Notes written in prison on a match box by Gjin Marku” and “Father Gjergj Suli’s cross, executed January

1948". Branching from the pavilion is a recreation of a prison cell. The visitor can enter this cramped space to get, perhaps, some inkling off how it might have felt to be incarcerated.

For me the most shocking part of the pavilion was the cabinet addressing the most recent crimes of the state-socialist regime. On display, among other objects, is an open pack of cigarettes and a key-ring from the pocket of a student protester shot dead in 1990, and next to them his blood stained T-shirt. In the same cabinet are photographs of the corpses of young men shot dead while trying to cross the border into Greece that same year. It is, I think, the ordinary everyday nature of many of these objects and the recentness of the events which makes viewing this cabinet so disturbing. The final cabinet represents the fall of the regime. One object on display is a video camera. The label explains that it is the;

"Camera which was used by the British journalist Daniel Damon from the Sky News television and by Albanian journalist Azis Gjërgji to film the events of the years 1990-01 in Albanian, among which the falling of Enver Hoxha's statue in Tirana" [sic].

A photograph of celebrations following the collapse of communism shows a grinning Dr Sali Berisha, the man who would become the first post-communist Prime Minister of Albania standing, literally, shoulder to shoulder with leading student demonstrators.

As important as what the Pavilion of Communist Terror represents is what is missing from that representation. It focusses solely on the crimes committed by the state-socialist regime. Representations of the positive achievements of that regime, like improvements in education and healthcare, have been erased from the museum entirely.

As previously mentioned, the Democratic Party frequently refer to their political opponents as "crypto-communists", and this kind of rhetoric was being used a great deal in 2012 in anticipation of the general election due in June of 2013. Reminding the Albanian people of "Communist Terror" by opening the high profile exhibition in the National Historical Museum can be considered part of the political campaign being waged at the time. Furthermore the use of a state funded museum to construct a biased and one sided narrative of the past for political gain can be considered indicative of the illiberal nature of Albania's democratic process at the time. This had not gone unnoticed within Albania. One day after

the pavilion opened an anonymous blogger associated with the Tirana based art collective Albanian Pyramids posted a review in which he/she stated;

“Personally I find it [the Pavilion] a very impressive collection of great importance, although it bothers me that Berisha is wrongly depicted like one of the rebels that made this event happen. Some things never seem to change; like the politicians in power shamelessly re-writing history in order to boost their personal legacy” (Pimsalabim, 2012: online)

Similar opinions were voiced by some of my interviewees. When asked his opinion of the Pavilion of Communist Terror Elton Caushi, co-owner Albania Trip, a tour company, told me;

“It is politicised. They are using history. As we say in Albania, “They are bringing water into their own mill”. The political party which was in power here until 1 year ago [the Democratic Party] were trying to glorify their leader, Sali Berisha, to make it look as though if it were not for him we would still be communist. The reality is that that guy was a fervent communist, but then he became apparently a fervent democrat ... While we used to cheer him a lot and we were very enthusiastic about him for a time then he got too much into this power game ...” (Elton Caushi, interviewed 03/06/2014)

Elton’s comments indicate a gradual process of disenchantment with Berisha’s government. Gjergj Erabara, a journalist interviewed a few weeks after the meeting with Elton, was more scathing still, stating of the Pavilion;

“It’s not a museum. It’s like an exposition. It’s not a real history. It’s like the history created by communists, but on the other side. Propaganda” (Gjergj Erabara, interviewed 29/06/2014)

Gjergj Erabara’s comments are somewhat similar to those which Badica (2011) makes about the depiction of state-socialism in Romanian museums. It appears that in Albania as in Romania – at least according to Badica (2011) - state-funded museums had replaced didactic communist propaganda with equally didactic “anti-communist” propaganda.

In summary, then, the National Historical Museum’s representation of the state-socialist era was focused entirely on the crimes committed by the regime. It represented

“communist terror” but not the achievements of the state-socialist regime such as the significant improvements in literacy and in health care. There was no representation of the typical, of the everyday experiences shared by most people in the state-socialist era. It is an example of museum as, to use Cameron’s (2004) terms “temple” rather than “forum”, a “top-down” representation of the past. It is “illiberal” inasmuch as it does not invite nuanced or objective analysis of the past or allow space for understanding the past or for reconciliation but rather presents a singular narrative in a didactic way.

While the NHM, the largest and most important state-funded museum in Albania, may have represented the “official” narrative of the Berisha government on the state-socialist era it became apparent during the course of my research that “counter-memory” of the state-socialist era was held, and sometimes surreptitiously communicated, by staff at some state-funded museums including the NHM. One staff member at the NHM interviewed in 2013 – shortly before the general election – expressed concern about the wilful destruction of state-socialist era built heritage that had occurred under the Democratic Party government but, fearing for her job, requested that I ensure her anonymity if I report her views. At another museum, the small provincial Pogradec Museum, I asked the curator about the apparent lack of any representation of the state-socialist era in the Pogradec Museum or in any of the other small “local” state-funded museums I had visited. She responded that, while she was aware that the state-socialist era was of interest to “Western” tourists like me, it could be difficult for a curator to represent that era without politicisation or controversy. Regarding her own decision to omit any representation of the state-socialist era she continued;

“Imagine, for the communist period there were lots of people that were saying ... oh, you know ... if you put stuff about communism we would destroy the museum. So to avoid this kind of debate we have decided, until now, not to show anything about the communist regime” (Curator of Pogradec Museum, interviewed 20/06/2014)

She then went on, however, to discuss openly her own ambivalent and nuanced views about the state-socialist era. After speaking about some harsh and repressive aspects of the Hoxha regime such as the imprisoning of some individuals for listening to “Western” pop music she continued;



“...even though we don’t accept the wildness and everything you can’t say that Albania wasn’t developed in this [state-socialist] period. The electrification for example, or the roads. I was just explaining this to a French tourist before, that many regions in Albania – the last time that they had paved roads was in the Roman period and they started to have paved roads again only in the communist period. So you can’t say that this was bad. This was a development for many regions, even in the mountains. I would have liked to show this kind of development [in the museum] but we have to avoid problems” (Curator of Pogradec Museum, interviewed 20/06/2014)

While the curator of the Pogradec Museum states that she and her staff have avoided representing the state-socialist era in order to “avoid problems” it is clear that she *had* been representing the era *verbally* to some “Western” visitors – a French tourist and then myself on that day alone. Furthermore it is clear that she had been verbally expressing “counter-memories” (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015) – memories out of kilter with the “official” representations of state-socialism on show at the NHM. At the end of the interview the curator remembered two particular objects, photographs of visits by some Chinese and Congolese officials located by the museum entrance, which did represent, for some people, the state-socialist era. Referring to some Albanian visitors who had made negative comments about the photographs the curator recalled;

“They said “Oh, why have you put this here”, because they were communists ... In fact they were delegations of the communist parties coming to Albania. We did it because they were the only foreigners that entered Pogradec and the museum at the time, so it is part of our history. For a small museum like this, in such an isolated period, having foreigners come here was not a small thing.

That such a seemingly innocuous pictures can draw a negative reaction gives some idea of the extent to which heritage from the state-socialist era has become divisive. But the reasons why the curator and her staff chose to display, and to continue to display, the photographs is also significant. The visits by foreign officials were, it appears, memorable events and a source of pride for the town and for the museum. The “inheritance” of local civic pride associated with state-socialist era events is a theme to which I will return later. It is arguably an example of the “re-embedding” specific memories (or counter-memories) which have contributed and

which continue to contribute to a local sense of place and identity. This is an example of the kind of “productive nostalgia” described by Blunt (2003) and Wheeler (2016). It is not a desire to return to the past but rather a desire to maintain particular connections to the past in order to maintain civic identity and pride.

I turn next to a museum located in the southern Albanian town of Gjirokastër which was constructed with funds from a “Western” NGO. This NGO funding has given the Gjirokastër Museum a degree of independence from the Albanian state and this has allowed the curators of that museum to take a ground breaking approach to the representation of Albania’s state-socialist era. As will become apparent, though, the museum has not escaped politicisation and controversy.

Gjirokastër is a town located in southern Albania which has been awarded UNESCO World Heritage status for its distinctive Ottoman era architecture and imposing castle. As well as being well known in Albania for its architecture it is also noted as the birth place of two famous Albanians; Albania’s most celebrated novelist Ismael Kadare and the dictator Enver Hoxha. During the state socialist era a huge statue of Enver Hoxha was placed in the town square and his childhood home (or a replica of it after it burned down in the 1960s) was turned into a museum. In the post-socialist era the statue was torn down and Enver Hoxha’s house repurposed as an ethnographic museum. Since the late 1990s a number of NGOs have been working alongside local government to promote Gjirokastër as a tourist destination through the development and improvement of infrastructure, facilities and attractions. In 2007 one of these NGOs, the Albania based Gjirokastër Foundation, set about constructing a museum in part of the town’s castle with the financial backing of a number of “Western” NGOs including the Packard Humanities Institute, the Hadley Trust and the Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund (Likmeta, 2013).

When it opened in September 2012 (six months after the opening of the new Pavilion of Communist Terror in Tirana) the Gjirokastër Museum – which was the first new museum to open in Albania since the state-socialist era – became the subject of nation-wide controversy and heated political debate due to the inclusion of an information panel about Enver Hoxha. Senior members of the Democratic Party, which was in government at the time, criticised the decision to represent Hoxha in the museum and commentators in Albania’s right-wing press accused the Gjirokastër Foundation of creating a “shrine” to the late dictator

(Likmeta, 2013, Sadi Petrela, interviewed 15/06/2014). I will explore the case of the Gjirokastër Museum in some depth as it provides valuable insight both into the politicisation of state-socialist era heritage in Albania and into the way in which flows of money and of ideas from out-with the country can “re-embed” as well as “dis-embed” memory. I begin with a discussion of the *raison d’être* of the new museum and how it differs markedly from that of most state-funded museums in Albania. Then I turn to the ground-breaking way in which the Gjirokastër Foundation went about representing the state-socialist era before going on to describe and analyse the museum exhibits themselves. After that I discuss the politicisation of the museum and the context in which it took place and, finally, I relate the case of the Gjirokastër Museum to Gidden’s (1990) theoretical concepts of “dis-embedding” and “re-embedding”.

Most state-funded museums in Albania were originally constructed by the country’s state-socialist regime for the purpose of nation-building and educating the public according to the wishes of the ruling elite. As discussed earlier, the Pavilion of Communist Terror at the NHM continues to reflect the didactic style of state-socialist era curatorship even as it presents a stridently “anti-communist” narrative. I have argued that the displays on the state-socialist era at the NHM are politically instrumental, made for the purpose of demonising the political opposition to the then incumbent Democratic Party and burnishing the “anti-communist” credentials of the Democratic Party and its leader, Sali Bersha. According to Sadi Petrela, the Director of the Gjirokastër Foundation, the Gjirokastër Museum was created with a very different purpose in mind. After describing the mission of the Gjirokastër Foundation – to save Gjirokastër’s unique Ottoman architecture and nurture sustainable tourism in the town and its surrounds – Sadi went on to explain the thinking behind the museum;

“...the idea was to give [foreign] tourists something that was missing, a general view of Gjirokastër, what in Gjirokastër is worth seeing, what is the most interesting thing. We saw the museum from that perspective. If I were a tourist what would I like to see in a museum of Gjirokastër? The answer was that you need to see small things, small hints about everything, in order that you are encouraged to stay more, to spend more time, to spend more money, providing more money for local businesses and the local population...” (Sadi Petrela interviewed 15/06/2014)

In contrast to the party-politically motivated representation of the state-socialist past in evidence at the NHM the Gjirokastër Museum is – according to Sadi – outwardly oriented, constructed with the needs and wants of foreign tourists in mind, and reflective of a neo-liberal plan to stimulate the local economy through the promotion of tourism. With the combination of funding from “Western” NGOs and an orientation toward “Western” tourists the Gjirokastër Museum might seem, at first glance, a prime example of the “dis-embedding” of memory; indeed in chapter 4, the chapter on the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity, I suggested it could be considered such. But when it comes to the representation of heritage and memory of the state-socialist era at the new museum matters are more complex and ambiguous as I will explain below.

The fact that the Gjirokastër Foundation was funded by foreign NGOs rather than by the state allowed, and perhaps necessitated, an approach to the representation of heritage, and in particular state-socialist era heritage, which is very different to that in evidence at the NHM. As discussed earlier, the approach at state-funded museums has been either to represent state-socialism didactically and in an entirely negative way or to avoid representing the era entirely. The Gjirokastër Foundation, with the backing of their “Western” donors, adopted practices of representation which resemble the more liberal approach of some “Western” museums. Sadi Petrela explained;

“We wanted to create a small example ... to bring a new approach to deal with communism. If you see the museums in Albania, they neglect communism completely, or they tend to be anti-communist, to be quite biased and one sided. We wanted to create, for communism ... to treat it in a quite balanced and unbiased way” (Sadi Petrela interviewed 15/06/2014)

Edvin Lamce, Project Coordinator for the Gjirokastër Foundation, recalled how he and his colleagues had set about the task of creating the museum;

“We contacted many professional consultants. Myself I did like you are doing today – interviews at the Institute of History, the University of Tirana, and with the public here [in Gjirokastër] and we revised the text and tried to improve it. We asked, for sure, about the communist times, and we had the approval of the public.

Everybody said it was one of the most important times for them” (Edvin Lamce interviewed 15/06/2014)

The main point from Edvin’s statement that I want to highlight here is the fact that he had contacted members of “the public” in Gjirokastër regarding the content of the museum. Indeed one of the features of the museum which set it apart from any other museum existing in Albania at the time was the display, on information panels, of quotes of local people describing their experiences of life during the era of Hoxha’s dictatorship. Another important point I want to highlight is Edvin’s insistence that the public *approved* of the Gjirokastër Foundation’s decision to represent the state-socialist era. This claim is broadly in line with the findings of the opinion survey carried out by the OSCE; according to the OSCE (2016) report seventy seven percent of respondents supported the creation of a national museum about the state-socialist era. I turn next to the narrative content of that part of the museum in which the state-socialist era is represented and the ways in which it differs from that of the “official” representation of that era in the NHM. I will argue that the Gjirokastër Museum serves to “re-embed” local memories of the state-socialist era and that this is so not *despite* of the museum having been funded by “Western” NGOs but *because* it was funded by those “Western” NGOs.

The state-socialist era is represented in the Gjirokastër Museum by three information panels and a small collection of objects. Each of the three panels has a different theme. These themes are; Political Prisoners; Everyday Life in Gjirokastër and; Enver Hoxha and Gjirokastër. I will discuss each in turn. The main focus of the panel entitled “Political Prisoners” is the story of Musine Kokalari, a woman from Gjirokastër who became Albania’s first published female writer shortly before the Second World War and who was persecuted and imprisoned during the state-socialist era for criticising Hoxha’s regime. As well as text the panel shows photographs of Musine Kokalari and two other political prisoners and of the dungeon inside Gjirokastër Castle (right next door to the museum) where these prisoners and others were held. It is a display which would not be out of place in the Pavilion of Communist Terror. The other two panels, however, set the Gjirokastër Museum apart from the NHM.

Regarding actual content it is the panel entitled Everyday Life in Gjirokastër which was most unusual and interesting at the time of my visit. While the NHM focused almost entirely on the plight of victims of the state-socialist regime, as does the panel on political prisoners in Gjirokastër, the panel on Everyday Life in Gjirokastër revealed something of what life was

like for “ordinary people” under the regime. Themes discussed on the panel include the ubiquitous “concrete mushroom” pill-boxes which can be seen all over Albania and which were manufactured a few miles from Gjirokaštër as well as other now defunct socialist era industries such as a cutlery factory which once employed people in the town. If the remembrance of now closed-down local industries might seem likely to engender a feeling of nostalgia in local residents other aspects of the panel seem likely to have the opposite effect. A display of various old passports donated by one local individual is accompanied by text explaining that, during the state-socialist era, these passports were required for travel within the state, even for day-trips to nearby beaches. It is a reminder of the way in which the regime curtailed the freedom of “ordinary people”, a narrative which does nothing to glorify the state-socialist regime.

As mentioned earlier the museum displays include quotes of individuals from Gjirokaštër who were interviewed by Edvin Lamce and other Gjirokaštër Foundation staff. At the time of my visit this was unique in Albania - the first adoption of a practice which is fairly commonplace at museums and heritage sites in “the West”. An example of this practice from the Gjirokaštër Museum is a quote of a gentleman from Gjirokaštër called Stefan Arseni who recalls some of the trials and tribulations of life under Hoxha’s regime;

“One day in the early 1980s my son found a gold cross that was left to me by my mother, which I had kept hidden in the house. He put it round his neck under his shirt. Someone saw it and they reported his “deviant” behaviour to the school director, who reported us to the Committee of the Party. This caused me many problems ... we had to be very careful ... a careless act could stigmatise the whole family and lead to real persecution” (Stefan Arseni quoted on information panel in the Gjirokaštër Museum, viewed 14/06/2014)

Again, this is a recollection of everyday life in the era of state-socialism which seems unlikely to elicit nostalgia. Over all, though, the Gjirokaštër Museum represents the state-socialist era in a way which is, as Sadi Petrela suggests, more “balanced” and nuanced, than the representation at the NHM.

The last of the information panels I want to discuss is the one entitled Enver Hoxha and Gjirokaštër. It is this information panel which became the subject of nationwide controversy

after the museum was opened in 2012. I will first discuss the narrative content of the panel and then discuss the controversy and the political context in which it occurred. The largest picture on the panel is a photograph taken during a visit to Gjirokastër, the town of his birth, by the dictator Enver Hoxha. The main square of the town is thronged with crowds and banners adorn the town's main hotel, a landmark which still exists today. It appears a joyous occasion. However, two versions of another photograph taken during one of Hoxha's visits reveal a darker aspect of Hoxha's rule. In the second version a number of individuals deemed undesirable by the regime have been edited out following their prosecution and imprisonment or execution. It is a simple but powerful way of demonstrating the state-socialist regime's willingness to manipulate representations of the past as well as their willingness to make people deemed undesirable "disappear". I want to reiterate once more, even though the content of the display on the state-socialist era is more balanced than the representation of that era in the NHM, it does not glorify the state-socialist regime. This being the case, the controversy which surrounded the museum requires some explanation.

Sadi Petrela and Edvin Lamce both explained to me that, to begin with, their plans to represent the state-socialist era and Enver Hoxha at the Gjirokastër Museum met with no opposition either locally or in central government. Sadi recalls;

"...we had to obtain one or two signatures, approving the general content of the museum from the Minister of Culture himself ... we introduced our idea that one or two panels, or three maybe, would be dedicated to communism and of course Enver Hoxha. Nobody had a complaint about that ... so we continue with the procedure, and they have given the authorisation to get some artefacts from different museums in Tirana" (Sadi Petrela interviewed 15/06/2014)

It was only late on in the process that opposition to the inclusion of an exhibit related to Enver Hoxha was made apparent. Sadi recalled his surprise at the apparent change of heart regarding the plans for the museum and the forceful way in which objections were made;

"...in the end Appalon Bace ... he at that time was the Director of the Institute of Monuments ... the branch of the Ministry of Culture regarding the maintenance of built heritage in Albania. He asked me in the end, "What are you going to do? Should you include [the exhibits on Hoxha] or not?" I sincerely answered him "I

am not sure” and he threatened – 100% I memorised this – he said if you include Enver Hoxha I will attack you in the media. He personalised everything!” (Sadi Petrela interviewed 15/06/2014)

The apparent change of heart, Sadi believes, had little to do with concerns over the content of the museum. Rather, he explained, it was a matter of party-politics. He gave his view of events;

“...at that time the rightist party, the Democrats, were in government and the Socialists were in the municipality ... I suspect that the museum became a case of a battle between the two political parties – a dirty political game – and so we were caught in the cross fire. Our museum became a national case because the leader of the Democratic Party accused the [Gjirokastër] municipality, which was Socialist ... that they are building a museum in Gjirokastër dedicated to Enver Hoxha. Have you seen such a museum in Gjirokastër dedicated to Enver Hoxha? You see how dirty the war was!” (Sadi Petrela interviewed 15/06/2014)

Given the actual content of the museum, and the often blatantly instrumental use of the country’s state-socialist past by the Democratic Party for political gain, Sadi’s account of the situation seems credible. It appears that, a matter of months before the 2013 general election, the incumbent Democratic Party had attempted to heighten fears that the Socialist Party opposition were “crypto-communists” by referring to a new “shrine to Enver Hoxha” in the Socialist Party run municipality of Gjirokastër.

As previously mentioned, a recent survey carried out by the OSCE (2016) found that a majority of respondents had ambivalent feelings about the state-socialist era, and most thought that at least some things were better then than now. Positive feelings and opinions regarding the state-socialist era may be higher still in those southern regions of Albania where support for Hoxha’s regime was typically highest. There is a mismatch between the ambivalent feelings and opinions about the state-socialist era expressed by a majority of respondents to the OSCE survey and the entirely negative representation of that era in the NHM. To put it another way there is a mismatch between the memories of state-socialism reproduced at the NHM and the commonly held “counter-memories” (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015) of many Albanians. As the Gjirokastër Museum represents and reproduces some memories of



everyday life in state-socialist era Gjirokastër it can be seen as, in a sense, “re-embedding” those memories in place. An example is the representation in the Gjirokastër Museum of Gjirokastër’s industrial heritage, the now closed and derelict cutlery factory, a place in which many older residents of Gjirokastër (the parents and grand-parents of younger residents) once worked and an industry for which Gjirokastër was once known. No mention is made of Albania’s state-socialist era industrial heritage in the NHM and nor was it mentioned in any other state-funded museum or heritage site I visited in the country between 2013 and 2016. But in the Gjirokastër Museum this important facet of local identity and local memory is recognised and represented.

In chapter 4. I suggested that “Western” NGOs have “dis-embedded” memory from the archaeological site of Butrint and that representations of Albania’s ancient past in the Gjirokastër Museum are also, to some extent, “dis-embedded” inasmuch as they are representations of the views of “Western” academics rather than those of local people. Regarding memory of the state-socialist era, however, funding from “Western” NGOs allowed the Gjirokastër Foundation to represent and “re-embed” memories that, for political reasons, were not at that time represented by state-funded museums. The fact that the Gjirokastër Museum was aimed primarily at “Western” tourists might also be expected to result in the “dis-embedding” of memory but again it has had unexpected consequences. Sadi explained to me that the museum’s orientation toward tourists justified, indeed necessitated, the inclusion of the controversial panel about Enver Hoxha

“Having that in mind ... [the objective to provide a general museum for foreign tourists] ... you couldn’t miss Enver Hoxha. It is a part – an important part – of the modern history of the city. And on the other side we have seen that most tourists are really very interested to see something about that, to learn something about his life. So people come here from different parts of the world and ask about him and [the novelist] Ismael Kadare. These are the two most prominent figures internationally I think” (Sadi Petrela interviewed 15/06/2014)

In this particular instance it appears that the openness of Albania to flows of both foreign money, via NGOs, and foreign tourists has in fact resulted in the “re-embedding” of memory (or counter-memory) which was in a sense “dis-embedded” from the locale by central

government. These flows of money and tourists *from outside of Albania* have allowed aspects of *local* memory and identity to be represented and reproduced at the Gjirokaštër Museum.

I turn now to two “places of memory” of a different kind. These are private collections of state-socialist era heritage objects that are owned and “curated” by individuals; Elton Caushi and Kristaq Cullufe. Both of these individuals have assembled their collections independently without funding from either the state or NGOs, acquiring and displaying objects according to their own judgement. They are examples of what Robertson (2016) has called sites of “heritage from below”. These collections can be considered to represent the most direct form of the “democratisation of memory”. As will become apparent they are representations of the state-socialist past which differ markedly from the “anti-communist” narrative of the NHM, places where “counter-memory” (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015) about Albania’s state-socialist past are preserved, represented and reproduced. I will examine Kristaq Cullufe’s “museum” first and then Elton Caushi’s collection.

Kristaq Cullufe is a retired plumber, a pensioner of limited financial means, who has turned his workshop in the town of Permet into a small museum. In his museum he displays a variety of objects, most of which date from the state-socialist era. Before going on to describe and analyse Kristaq’s museum I want to expand upon the context in which his museum has been constructed. Permet became, or was made, a nationally important “place of memory” during the state-socialist era as it was the place where, on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1944 at the so called “Permeti Congress”, the Partisans decided to break up the National Liberation Front and to form a provisional government under Communist Party control. This event was marked through the construction of both a museum (which is derelict and has been looted and vandalised) and a large monument (which still stands) in the town of Permet as well as by an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). On the 24<sup>th</sup> May each year throughout the state-socialist era the town became the focus of national attention when the Party elite attended a special commemorative celebration there.

An aspect of this yearly occasion was a practice of remembrance of those partisans killed during the Second World War which involved dressing local children in white – except for a red neckerchief - and having each of them stand on the grave of a fallen soldier. At the time of my visit to Permet, in June 2014, television footage of the post-socialist continuation of this tradition – filmed in Permet in May of that year - had caused nation-wide controversy

as the Democratic Party and right wing media had accused those people taking part in the ceremony of being “crypto-communists”. Like the controversy over the Gjirokaštër Museum this was politically motivated as the municipality of Permet was overwhelmingly Socialist.

As noted above, the museum constructed in Permet during the state-socialist era is now closed and has been looted and vandalised and though some aspects of the 24<sup>th</sup> May celebrations have continued these are subject to contestation and ridicule by parts of the national media. While, in the state-socialist era, Permet was valorised as a place of “official” remembrance, in the post-socialist era such remembrance has become “counter-memory” (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015). This is the context in which Kristaq Kullufe’s museum should be understood. Kristaq’s museum is a place of “heritage from below” (Robertson, 2016) where local “counter-memory” (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015) is represented and reproduced.

I will begin with an auto-ethnographic description of the experience of visiting Kristaq’s museum. Kristaq took my translator and me through his yard and into the outbuilding by his house which had once been his storeroom and workshop. The walls of this room were covered with photographs, paintings, documents and shelves on which were displayed all kinds of objects (see figure 6.1). There was no labelling of objects. Kristaq provided a verbal interpretation, bringing objects or pictures down from the shelves, off the wall or out of storage boxes and talking about them, sometimes choosing objects himself and sometimes responding to questions or indications of interest from myself or my translator. It was a manner of presentation which was seemingly ad hoc and there was no apparent “core” narrative to Kristaq’s choices or recollections. Two key themes could be identified, however. One was the collection and display of objects manufactured during the state-socialist era and no longer manufactured in the post-socialist era. The other was the collection and display of reminders and representations of Permet during its state-socialist “heyday”, the era when the town was celebrated and valorised as a place of special historical significance.

The first objects which Kristaq pointed out, when we entered the museum, was a stack of radios of the “Iliria” brand (see figure 6.2) which, he told us, had been manufactured in the coastal city of Durrës. They were, he stated, “from communism” and no longer made (Kristaq Kullufe, interviewed 22/04/2015: translated by Costa Nace). Amongst other such everyday objects which he pointed was cutlery made in Gjirokaštër (see figure 6.3) and glasswork

**Figure 6.1. Kristaq in his museum**



Figure 6.2. Kristaq shows an “Iliria” brand radio, produced in Durrës, Albania, during the state-socialist era.



**Figure 6.3. A display of cutlery produced in Gjirokaštër during the state-socialist era.**



produced nearby. These were things which Kristaq valued enough to keep and to show to visitors, things which seemed to kindle in him a sense of regional or national pride. His regret at the decline of manufacturing was clear when he told us that the things he had collected were no longer made. He also showed us representations of state-socialist era industry and modernisation; a socialist realist painting of the docks in Durrës and a state-socialist era 100 Lek note depicting the construction of a hydro-electric power station and another depicting a steel works. These, too, were shown with a sense of pride. This was evidence of what Albanians could do, of what they could achieve. Though such objects could easily be dismissed today as state-socialist propaganda it seemed that they still held meaning for Kristaq. When I asked him why he had decided to collect objects from the state-socialist era he replied;

“Because I could see that everything from the old times was being destroyed or thrown away. Many people wanted to get rid of everything from communism. I didn’t like to see everything from our past getting destroyed. I wanted to save some of the things, some of the culture, some of the history from the time of communism”. (Kristaq Cullufe, interviewed 22/04/2015: translated by Costa Nace)

It is useful to recall at this point Edensor’s (2002: 51) observation that, while everyday objects may typically be “felt and sensed in an un-reflexive fashion”, in times of change:

“...when familiar features are missing or threatened, or when new or foreign features encroach, they are immediately noticeable and can result in disorientation and discomfort”. (Edensor, 2002: 51)

It is partly in response to this kind of disorientation and discomfort, I believe, that Kristaq felt the need to save those objects which had been familiar and “everyday” during the state-socialist era. Like those individuals in the former GDR who, according to Berdahl (2010), collected memorabilia in order to preserve some sense of “*heimat*” or home Kristaq assembled a collection of everyday things which have come to represent and memorialise a bygone era. It is a kind of “re-embedding” of national identity in an era of “dis-embedding” and dramatic change. But as I will argue below, Kristaq’s collection also helped to preserve a special *local* identity.

Some of Kristaq’s most treasured objects were representative of the special identity which was given to Permet during the state-socialist era. These included photographs taken



during the May 24<sup>th</sup> celebrations which show buildings decked in banners and crowds gathered in the town square to see and hear the speeches of visiting dignitaries. These photographs were shown with pride and some apparent nostalgia. Everyone in the town, Kristaq told us a little wistfully, looked forward to May 24<sup>th</sup> in those days. What Kristaq expressed was certainly “counter-memory” (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015). In one photograph some people in the crowd are holding banners which say “Rrofte [long live] Enver Hoxha” (see figure 6.4.). The display of this photograph in a state-funded museum would likely have caused nation-wide controversy and accusations of “Enverism” and “crypto-communism”. It remains the case that some memories of state-socialism can only be represented and reproduced in private spaces without becoming the subject of heated political debate and (mis)representation in the national media.

Another set of objects in Kristaq’s collection relating to the May 24<sup>th</sup> events is the sheet music of secular state-socialist era “hymns” sung during the celebrations. Showing us one of these, a song entitled “Glory of Martyred Partisans”, Kristaq told us that his older brother had been killed at the age of twenty two while fighting, alongside the partisans, against German occupation. His brother was among those honoured at the 24<sup>th</sup> May celebrations and because of this these celebrations had had particular significance for Kristaq and his family. His brother’s status as war hero and “martyr” would also have given Kristaq’s family special prestige. Edvin Lamce of the Gjirokastër Foundation had previously explained to me how the involvement of one individual with the Partisans could bring honour to an entire family during the state-socialist era;

“My Grandfather, he was a Partisan. So a special sort of identity of my childhood, when I was growing up, was being the grandson of a Partisan. We have been proud. In the neighbourhood we have been respected. We had to celebrate every sixth of July, because it was one of the battles where my Grandfather participated with other Partisans against the Germans. I remember we were very proud of that”. (Edvin Lamce, interviewed 14/06/2014)

For Kristaq, then, the state-socialist era was a time in which his hometown and his family had been accorded special status and prestige. In the post-socialist era this special prestige had been lost, the towns museum had been closed down, robbed and trashed and traditions of remembrance dating from the state-socialist era had been criticised and mocked by some of



Figure 6.4. Kristaq shows a photograph of the state-socialist era May 24<sup>th</sup> celebrations in Permet



the national media. It was in this context, and in part in response to this context, that he had assembled his museum. It was a place in which he could preserve and reproduce local “counter-memories” (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015) of a time in which his home town and his family had been accorded special status and meaning. I turn next to another private collection of objects dating from and representative of the state-socialist era, that of Elton Caushi.

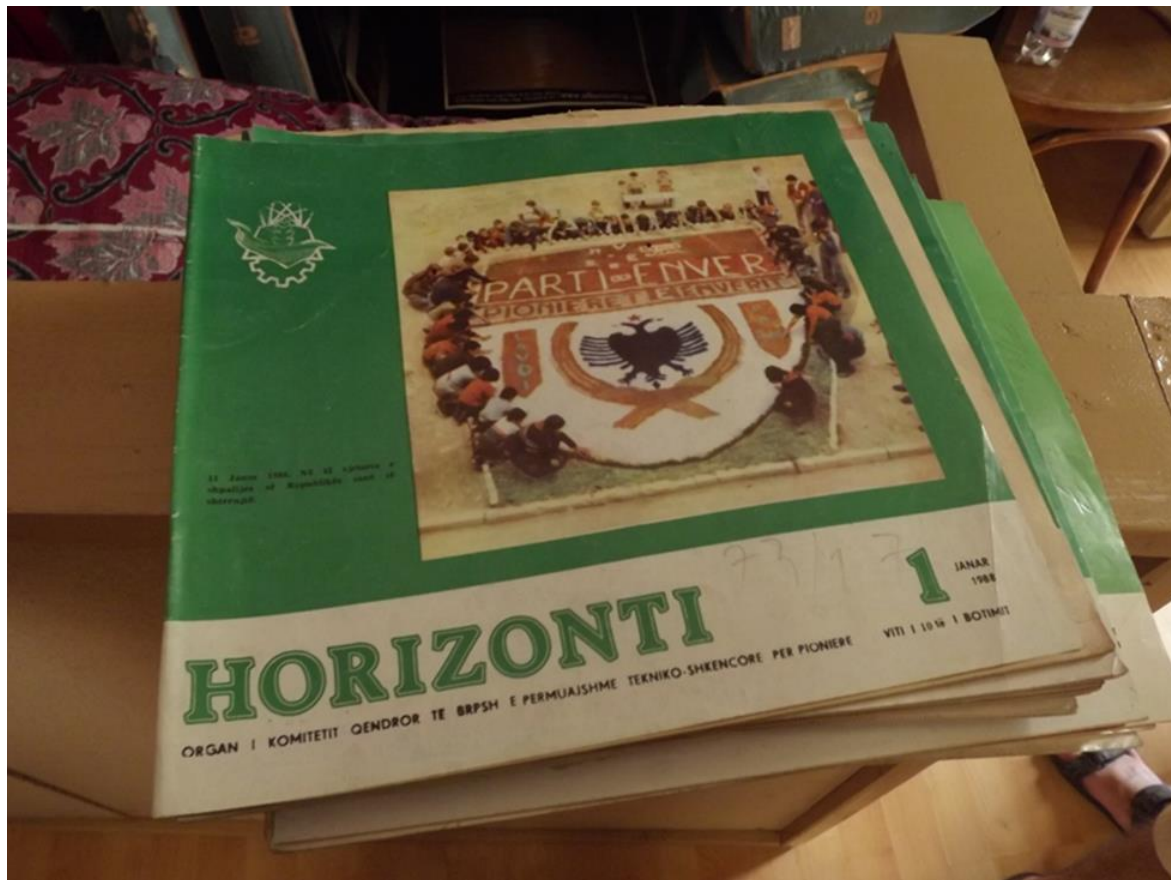
Elton Caushi, who is aged about forty five, is the co-owner of a small tour guide company, Albania Trip, which is based in Tirana. He keeps, in a corner of the Albania Trip office, a small collection of objects dating from the state-socialist era which he shows to clients who are interested in the history and heritage of that era. I, like many other tourists, viewed Elton’s collection as part of a guided tour of state-socialist era heritage sites in and around Tirana which he provides through Albania Trip. Elton introduced his collection thus;

“So, here we have a few things from communist times. I used to use them as a child. They are my personal things. Like this magazine which was called *Horizonti* which was a magazine for children between, say, 10 and 14 years old. This one was about technology, science, research. It was really cool” (Elton Caushi, interviewed 12/06/2014)

It was immediately apparent that this collection, a collection of “everyday” items from Elton’s childhood, and the narrative which Elton constructed around them, would, like Kristaq’s museum, be very different to the Pavilion of Communist Terror. In the official representation at the NHM nothing was “really cool” about the era of state-socialism. Elton went on to relate the objects to his own childhood experiences and memories. Showing a picture of some children making a mosaic which included the slogan “Party of Enver” (see figure 6.5) he recalled;

“Under Enver Hoxha we would make big mosaics – we would get broken bricks, break them up and use the bits to make mosaics and if you made a big mosaic you could appear in a magazine like this. After he [Hoxha] died every April we would do that for his death anniversary. I cried a lot when he died. Because I was convinced that he was like a God. If I was good at school – which I was – it meant

Figure 6.5. The front cover of Elton's *Horizonti* magazine shows children making a mosaic featuring the slogan "Party of Enver"



that I might have the chance to meet him. And then when he died I thought “Oh my God I am not going to meet him now””. (Elton Caushi, interviewed 12/06/2014)

These memories recalled and recounted by Elton are, like those recounted by Kristaq Kullufe, “counter-memories” of state-socialism (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015); they are memories which are counter to the entirely negative “official memories” represented and reproduced at the NHM. Elton’s recollection and representation of the state-socialist era was not entirely positive but rather nuanced and reflexive. While he recalled some aspects of his childhood fondly he also recalled the stresses and dangers of living in a dictatorship, some of which only became apparent to him when he got older:

“It was a very romantic time to be a child. There were no cars in Tirana and we could go anywhere, run anywhere, knowing we would be safe. And we were sort of united ... we were actually poor but so was everyone else so we didn’t feel poor. But at the same time, more so when I got older and understood more, we were scared, because even your best friend might turn out to be a spy or go to the police station if, say, you secretly listened to U2 ... because it was “capitalist music” and I could go to jail for that.” (Elton Caushi, interviewed 12/06/2014)

One object which Elton kept and showed represented the darker more disturbing aspects of life during the state-socialist era, a book from which the faces of particular individuals, including the one-time Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu, had been cut out or scribbled over. Elton explained that these individuals had fallen out of favour with Hoxha and that to be caught with photographs or writings of Shehu or the other disgraced politicians could have led to serious trouble. He recalled his parents frantically searching through their books after hearing news of Shehu’s fall from favour, making sure that no writings by the former Prime Minister or photographs of him remained. The point I want to make here is that Elton’s representation of the state-socialist past was one which included both light and dark and which reflected the kind of ambivalence with which many Albanian people seem to view that era.

In common with Kristaq, Elton kept and showed an interest in everyday objects which were produced in Albania during the state-socialist era and which are not produced there

anymore. For example he showed an old radio set of the same kind that Kristaq had shown, explaining as Kristaq had done that the “Iliria” brand was unique to state-socialist era Albania having been produced in the Albanian city of Durrës and adding that “they don’t make these anymore, like a lot of things that used to be made here in communism” (Elton Caushi, interviewed 12/06/2014). Also in common with Kristaq he showed objects which represented the industrialisation and modernisation of Albania which had taken place during the state-socialist era. One of these, a magazine-almanac featuring photographs of hydro-electric schemes, steel works and other symbolic sites and achievements of Albania’s modernisation under the state-socialist regime, was shown with the same sense of pride tinged with nostalgia that Kristaq had displayed:

“This was a big exposition showing what Albania had achieved. These are things that were made in Albania. Yeah ... this magazine was cool, although it was propaganda. It’s all propaganda materials, but some of it had a romantic, or a scientific approach, some of it was good”. (Elton Caushi, interviewed 12/06/2014)

There is a marked similarity between these aspects of Elton’s and Kristaq’s representations and remembrances of the state-socialist and those written about by Bach (2002), Berdahl (2010), Godeanu-Kenworthy (2011) and Petrovic (2013). A common theme of pride in the collective achievements of state-socialist era and regret at the loss of that sense of pride in the post-socialist era can be identified in each of these accounts. In the state-socialist era, when Elton was a child, the achievements of the regime and of the Albanian people - as represented in the almanac he showed me - had real meaning. Even if it was propaganda the magazine was “cool” back then. Lowenthal’s (1985:8) observation that the nostalgic may miss “not so much the past itself as its supposed aspirations, less the memory of what actually was than of what was once thought possible” seems particularly apt in Elton’s case. While today he recognises the almanac as propaganda it is the days when that propaganda was convincing and exciting and a source of collective national pride for which he feels nostalgic. Elton insisted that, although he did feel some nostalgia for his childhood, a return to state-socialism was “impossible” and that very few people in Albania really wished for such a thing (Elton Caushi, interviewed 12/06/2014).

The nostalgia expressed by both Elton and Kristaq are further examples of the kind of “productive nostalgia” described by Blunt (2003) and Wheeler (2016). Neither desired a return

to state-socialist rule but both considered it important to remember those things about the state-socialist past which were, for them, valuable and good. For both individuals this included everyday objects such as radios which had been made in Albania. For Elton it included the magazines which constructed exciting narratives of national modernisation and progress. And for Kristaq it included the May 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations of the Permet Congress; special days when his home town became the centre of national attention and when his family was honoured for his brother's wartime sacrifice.

The final "place of memory" I want to discuss is the Tirana Pyramid. This is a place at which the "democratisation of memory" has occurred in a dramatic way in the face of an increasingly illiberal regime. The case of the Tirana Pyramid also demonstrates that a single place can be remembered in many very different ways and can have many different meanings for different people, and that this can result in contestation when an attempt is made to fix to a place one "essential" identity. It provides evidence of the fact that, as Beyen and Deseure (2015: 3) put it, memories "cannot simply be forced on people" by governments and "elites" and that collective memories and senses of place formed from the everyday experience of ordinary life can be stronger and more meaningful than those constructed and disseminated "from above".

The building in central Tirana commonly known as the Pyramid was originally constructed as a museum of the life and legacy of Enver Hoxha. Reputed to have been the most expensive building ever constructed in Albania, the Pyramid stands about eight stories tall at its apex. When it opened in 1988 it stunned Albanian visitors with its scale as well as its hi-spec interior. Edvin Lamce of the Gjirokastër Foundation told me;

"My mother, she had the chance to visit [the Enver Hoxha Museum] not long after the day of inauguration. You cannot imagine! It was one of the biggest investments, and inside ... they say it was too much for an Albanian to visit that museum. Many TVs – colour TVs when we had seen only black and white TVs - playing movies of Enver Hoxha, many objects of Enver Hoxha ..." (Edvin Lamce, interviewed 14/06/2014)

The building was not used as a museum for long, however. In February 1990 it was becoming increasingly apparent that the communist regime could not last, and shortly after the statue

of Enver Hoxha was toppled in Tirana's main square the Enver Hoxha Museum was emptied of its contents and closed down.

While some buildings associated with Enver Hoxha were vandalised and destroyed in the 1990s the Pyramid was too large and solidly constructed to be so easily swept away. Between 1990 and 2010 the building was put to a variety of uses, being at different times used as a conference centre, a nightclub, the office of a number of foreign NGOs involved in supporting refugees displaced by the Kosovo Crisis and the office of an Albanian media company. After 2001 the outside of the Pyramid – which is easy to climb – had become an example of what Light and Young (2010) term “left-over spaces of socialism”; a place which had once been iconic of Enver Hoxha but which in the post-socialist era had no official purpose. But though it had no *official* purpose it was, and still is, often used as a public space, particularly by teenagers and students who congregate there when the weather is warm (see figure 6.6). As such it became a well-known and important space in the centre of the city, particularly for students and other young people.

In 2010 a conference centre which occupied the greater part of the building was closed down and the Democratic Party government announced plans to demolish the Pyramid entirely and to replace it with an architecturally ambitious and costly new national parliament. Prime Minister Berisha seemed to imply that the Pyramid's state-socialist past was a factor in the government's decision to redevelop the site when he stated at a committee meeting that “There are 30,000 square metres estimated at 2,000 Euros per square-metre, which have no other value apart from “Enverist nostalgia”” (Hala, 2010: online). The parliamentary deputy, Enkelejd Alibeaj, alluded to the poetic justice of replacing the dictator's vanity project with a parliament; “We can no longer keep a place that holds the ghost of the dictator. We shall build a new complex where the spirit of democracy will thrive” (ibid). By highlighting the Pyramid's original use the politicians were attempting to generate popular support for the project and, at the same time, to maintain their credentials as the “anti-communist” party.

Shortly after the project was announced the white Italian Carrara marble which once clad the building was stolen revealing the unlovely concrete beneath, windows were smashed and the Pyramid became largely derelict and scrawled with graffiti. This degradation of the site was, in the opinion of some observers, allowed or even encouraged by the government of the time. A Tirana based museum guide, who requested anonymity, told me;



**Figure 6.6. Young people spending time on the Tirana Pyramid**





“You see it now? How it is? It never used to be like that. It is very ugly now – with graffiti and all broken – but it used to be covered with marble. The marble was all stolen and sold in the street. Now, maybe, it is in people’s bathrooms here in Tirana! And they [the government] did nothing to stop it. They let it happen. In fact they wanted it, I would say. They want it [the Pyramid] to be ugly so no-one wants it, so they can get rid of it and build the new parliament here”. (Tour guide, interviewed 05/06/2013)

The Democratic Party government’s ploys to highlight once more the Pyramid’s original purpose as a museum to Enver Hoxha and to allow, or perhaps encourage, the degradation of the building so as to make it less attractive were not successful. For those students and other young people who had become used to using the outside of the Pyramid as a public space the building no longer represented Enver Hoxha or state-socialism.

In 2011 a student led campaign to save the Pyramid from demolition grew into one of the largest civil protests to have occurred in Albania since the fall of the communist regime, with rallies attracting thousands to the Pyramid and its surrounds. In June 2014 I interviewed Fioralba Duma, one of the organisers of the campaign to save the Pyramid. When asked why she had been motivated to help organise the campaign to save the Pyramid Fioralba explained:

“For many reasons. In the post-communist era the building was changed into a cultural centre where many high schools held cultural and artistic activities, including mine. Additionally, in my early youth we used to spend a lot of time in the space surrounding the Pyramid. It served as a meeting place and one of the very few public spaces where youngsters could hang around. In other words the building symbolized for us a space which was captured by Albanian youth from the communist regime ...” (Fioralba Duma, interviewed 28/06/2014)

Clearly the Pyramid is a “place of memory” for Fioralba, but the memories she has of the place are neither those which the state-socialist regime wished the building to represent nor those which Sali Berisha’s government wished to attach to it. It is memory and meaning associated in part with the “unofficial” use of the building in the post-socialist era. This way of

remembering and valuing the Pyramid was widespread amongst the younger people I interviewed about the campaign. Edvin Lamce, for example, recalled his days as a student in Tirana;

“If you met your friends in a café or a bar you had to pay for a drink and we didn’t have much money for that – but the Pyramid was a place in the city where we could meet friends and we could sit as long as we wanted, just talking and enjoying the view” (Edvin Lamce, interviewed 14/06/2014)

A post-graduate student who had attended one of the rallies held at the Pyramid, and who requested anonymity, explained to me his own reasons for wanting to save the building;

“I used to climb up there when I was a child and play. You could slide down it then because it was covered in marble, not like now. It was fun. So I have happy memories. And also coming here when I was a teenager with girlfriends because, you know, it is dark here at night and quiet ... So the *Piramida* ... it is part of our lives. It is part of our history, you could say. But not as a museum for Enver Hoxha as it was before, even though we know about that. For us it is the place where we played as children, or come with our girlfriends, or smoke with our friends. And also it is one of the few buildings in Tirana which is really special. Something you can’t find in any other city” (Student interviewed 05/06/2013)

These are “counter-memories” (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015) inasmuch as they are counter to the memories which the Berisha government was trying to fix to the Pyramid. But they are not “counter-memories” of state-socialism. Rather they are post-socialist memories; memories which go to form a new sense of place relating to the Pyramid which has little to do with Enver Hoxha.

Elton Caushi of the tour company Albania Trip summed up the campaign, with which he had been sympathetic, and his opinion on what had motivated it;

“The Pyramid was only open as a museum for 2 or 3 years ... so most people don’t relate it so much to its past as a museum of Enver Hoxha. What happened with the Pyramid is that it was a public space, with a park around it ... this was a place where they had business fairs and rock concerts, and one of the best clubs in town

as well. So when they said it was to be demolished people were angry. It was a big part of Tirana. So crowds of people all came out to the square ... and this had never happened ... people had come out for the Democratic Party or Socialist Party or this or that party ... but never for a civil cause. So the Pyramid brought about the first civil movement in Albania. The people made it clear that if they destroyed the Pyramid they would be very angry. If there was a new parliament there would be Kalashnikov armed guards and you would not be able to go there with your girlfriend, your friends, you wouldn't be able to sit there and have a drink and watch the world going by as we used to do in the 90s" (Elton Caushi, interviewed 03/06/2014)

The protests added a new layer of meaning to the Pyramid. Collective memories of organising and attending the protests, an exciting and meaningful event in the lives of many of those who took part, have given the Pyramid a newly iconic status for many young Albanians. Fioralba Duma (Interviewed 28/06/2014), one of the organisers of the protests, recalled that at the time:

"It felt like Berisha's government was taking away what youngsters managed to capture from the communist regime. A public space once more would become a trophy of the seclusion and privileges of the new political class..."

She then added that, during the protests, the Pyramid had become:

"...somehow a symbol of change, of really moving on from the time of communism which, with Sali Berisha in power, hadn't totally happened yet". (Fioralba Duma, interviewed 28/06/2014)

The changing and evolving meaning of the Pyramid supports Massey's (1995: 186) claim that place is always "in the process of formation" and so "forever unachieved". It was only when the Pyramid was scheduled for demolition that its importance as a place of memory – of unmediated memories formed in the post-socialist era - became apparent as large numbers of people came together to prevent its destruction. The civil movement to protect the Pyramid is evidence of the "democratisation of memory" occurring in the face of an increasingly illiberal government's attempt to shape memory of a particular place – the Pyramid – and of the nation-state more widely. With the Socialist Party now in government the Tirana Pyramid

is no longer – for the time being at least – slated for demolition. In 2018 Edi Rama, the Socialist Party Prime Minister, unveiled plans for the redevelopment of the Pyramid as a technology education centre (Levy, 2018).

### 6.3. Conclusions

In this chapter I have explored recent and contemporary representations of Enver Hoxha and the state-socialist era at a variety of different places of memory. I have identified an “official” government sanctioned “anti-communist” discourse as well as various forms of, in some cases localised, “counter-memory” (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015). While the National Historical Museum, the only state-funded museum to represent the state-socialist era at the time of my field trips, represented only the crimes of Hoxha’s regime I found that a number of other places of memory had been constructed which represented and reproduced more nuanced, ambivalent, and in some respects positive memories. What these places of counter-memory have in common is freedom from reliance on funding from central government. The small private collections of Kristaq Kullufe and Elton Caushi are of a scale which has required little financial investment while the Gjirokastër Museum was funded by “Western” NGOs. The Tirana Pyramid, a somewhat different case, ceased to function as an officially, or even unofficially, designated place of memory after the fall of the state-socialist regime, but memories were unreflexively “made” there nonetheless as it became an unofficial public space where student and other young people spent time. When the Democratic Party Government declared their intention to demolish the Pyramid and played on the building’s original use as a museum of Enver Hoxha to garner support for their plans, large numbers of students and young people came out in protest. I found that these young people had come to associate the Pyramid with “every-day” post-socialist era memories of childhood play and/or of meeting friends and passing time rather than with its brief state-socialist incarnation as a museum for Enver Hoxha.

Even though Albania’s government had, during Sali Berisha’s time as head of state, become worryingly illiberal and dogmatic in some respects it is apparent that the Democratic Party had little success in reconstructing and “fixing” memories of the country’s state-socialist past. While some people in Albania, quite understandably, still revile Hoxha’s regime, a larger number of people seem to view the state-socialist past with more ambivalence, recalling the positives as well as the negatives, the stuff of everyday life as well as the crimes of the regime. Counter-memories of place, in Pogradec, Gjirokastër, Permet and Tirana, have not been lost. Rather they have been recalled, represented and reproduced; at the Gjirokastër Museum, at Kristaq Kullufe’s museum and Elton Caushi’s collection, and even – verbally at least – in the

state-funded museum in Pogradec. In Tirana, the Berisha government's attempts to "fix" particular state-socialist era memories and meanings to the Pyramid in order to gain public support for the demolition of that structure also failed. New "layers" of post-socialist-era memory have changed the way the Pyramid is perceived by many Albanians, proving that "sense of place" is not a "once and for all" thing and that it is not easily "fixed".

Despite of the instrumental and divisive "propaganda" produced by the increasingly illiberal Democratic Party the kind of "democratisation of memory" described by Atkinson (2008) has occurred in Albania. "Official" representations of Albania's state-socialist past have been challenged and undermined "from below" and a plurality of voices has emerged. It has not, on the most part, been "elites" which have shaped people's memories of the post-socialist era or people's senses of place. Rather it appears that it is often shared or individual memories of everyday life, sometimes relating to and maintained at particular locales, which give meaning to the past and to place. For Kristaq Kullufe, the familiar mass-produced common-place products of state-socialism and the 24<sup>th</sup> May ceremonies of remembrance in Permet; for Elton Caushi playing out on the traffic free streets of state-socialist era Tirana and creating mosaics out of broken brick; for the student protesters who saved the Tirana Pyramid from demolition, sliding down the structure's marble slopes as children or relaxing and taking in the view with friends as teenagers and young adults; these are memories, or "counter-memories" (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015), which have been recalled and reproduced against, and despite of, the wishes of the ruling elite.

## 7.0 Conclusions

In this thesis I have critically evaluated the concept of the “democratisation of memory” and analysed the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity in the context of post-socialist Albania. In this chapter I will recap and compare the key findings of the three analysis chapters then go on to relate my key findings to studies of the “democratisation of memory”, or similar and parallel processes, in the context of post-socialist CEE more broadly. Finally I will discuss the two key contributions to theory which this thesis makes; a reassessment of the concept of the “democratisation of memory” and a reassessment of the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis I have explored and analysed the occurrence and nature of the “democratisation of memory” in the context of post-socialist Albania in relation to the representation and (re)construction of myths and memories of Albanian national identity. By comparing the process of “democratisation of memory” described by Atkinson (2008) – that is the process of “democratisation of memory” as it has occurred in the UK – with different ways in which the “democratisation of memory” has occurred in the context of post-socialist Albania I have revealed that the “democratisation of memory” can take different forms in different national contexts. Furthermore, through the comparative analysis of the “democratisation of memory” of three different myths of Albanian national identity I have revealed that different types or patterns of the “democratisation of memory” can occur *within* one nation-state.

The types or patterns of the “democratisation of memory” described in chapter 4 and chapter 5 - that is in those chapters in which I discuss the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the myth of Skanderbeg - have much in common. In neither case do they closely resemble the type of “democratisation of memory” described by Atkinson (2008). While Atkinson (2008: 383) describes the “emergence of plural voices that ... dispute or undermine traditional, “official” narratives of history” no such process has occurred in Albania in relation to the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity or the myth of Skanderbeg. Both of these myths of Albanian national identity remain hugely popular in Albania and they are reproduced and (re)constructed rather than disputed and undermined. In chapter 6, however, I describe a type or pattern of the “democratisation of memory” which contrasts with that described in

chapters 4 and 5 and which resembles much more closely that described by Atkinson (2008). This difference can, arguably, be related to issues of geopolitics. Both the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the myth of Skanderbeg are geopolitically “useful” in contemporary times whereas myth and memory of Enver Hoxha and his regime are not.

In chapters 4 and 5 I described the way in which the post-socialist process of marketization has allowed the commodification of signs and symbols of “Illyrian-ness” and of Skanderbeg and pointed out that this has produced a proliferation of those signs and symbols. The symbol of Skanderbeg’s distinctive roebuck helmet adorns Kastrati brand petrol stations throughout Albania and the name of an ancient Epirote/Illyrian tribe is encountered whenever one buys a bottle of Kaon brand beer, to give just two examples. This multiplication of signs and symbols of popular myths of Albanian identity and the multiplication of opportunities to “consume” those myths is, I have argued, a facet of the democratisation of memory. It has occurred due to the popularity of those myths and the demand for those products, not due to diktat from some ruling elite. And this multiplication of signs and symbols of the popular myths reproduces them and embeds them in everyday life. It adds to the “matrix of images, ideas, spaces, things, discourses and practices” (Edensor, 2002: 17) which contribute to a sense of shared Albanian ethno-national identity.

In chapters 4 and 5, respectively, I argued that the enduring popularity of both the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the myth of Skanderbeg can be explained, in part, by their geopolitical significance and “usefulness”. The myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity is geopolitically significant as it supports claims of Albanian autochthony throughout “Greater Albania”, and most importantly in Kosovo and parts of Macedonia. It is used as moral justification for the independence of Kosovo and the semi-independence of “Albanian” regions of Macedonia. The myth of Skanderbeg has a different kind of geopolitical significance and “usefulness”. As the man who, according to the popular myth, saved Western Europe from invasion by the Ottoman Empire Skanderbeg is used to flag Albania’s inherent “European-ness” and to refute notions that Albania is an “un-European” Oriental “other”.

State-funded museums and heritage sites in Albania represent and (re)construct the *popular myth* of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the *popular myth* of Skanderbeg. Like those populist museums and heritage sites described by Palmer (1999: 319) they (re)construct narratives of the nation which are “exciting” and “glamorous” and which “fill people’s hearts



with a glow of national pride". As these museums provide narrative content which is widely popular amongst the Albanian public the "democratisation of memory" has not produced a proliferation of counter narratives in the manner described by Atkinson (2008). Not, at least, in relation to the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity or the myth of Skanderbeg.

While the myths of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and of Skanderbeg are widely, almost universally, popular in Albania because of their geopolitical usefulness, myths and memories of Enver Hoxha and of state-socialism are not geopolitically "useful". Rather they are contested and divisive within Albania. In chapter 6 I explained that the right wing Democratic Party constructed an "anti-communist" discourse while in government both to capitalise on their perceived role as the party which liberated Albania from communism and to besmirch their main political rival, the Socialist Party, which has evolved out of the once Stalinist Party of Labour. At the time of my research trips Albanian state-funded museums either represented state-socialism in a completely negative way or did not represent the state-socialist era at all. At the same time many Albanian people held more positive or ambivalent "counter-memories" of state-socialism (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015). While these "counter-memories" (ibid) were not represented in state-funded museums they were represented in small privately owned and curated museums and collections, and also at the "Western" NGO funded Gjirokastër Museum. The appearance of these places of counter-memory which dispute and undermine "official" discourse on heritage is a "democratisation of memory" of the kind described and celebrated by Atkinson (2008: 383). Here is the "emergence of plural voices" which "dispute [and] undermine "official" narratives of history" (Atkinson, 2008: 383). As mentioned previously, the comparative analysis of the "democratisation of memory" of the three different myths of Albanian national identity reveals that different types or patterns of the "democratisation of memory" can occur *within* one nation-state.

Perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of the "democratisation of memory" in the context of post-socialist Albania has been the campaign to save the Tirana Pyramid from demolition. While the leadership of the Democratic Party represented the Pyramid as being a symbol of Enver Hoxha in order to garner support for the removal of the building and the redevelopment of the site as a new parliament building the thousands of young people and students who gathered at the Pyramid in order to protest against its demolition associated

the Pyramid with its use as a public space in the post-socialist era. Individuals who had been involved in the campaign to save the Pyramid described “counter-memories” (Legg, 2005) of the place - of sliding down the sloping sides of the structure as children and of meeting friends and enjoying the view as young adults – when interviewed. As the campaign was ultimately successful -plans to demolish the pyramid were shelved – it is an instance where the “democratisation of memory” can be observed to have had a clear and tangible political impact in post-socialist Albania.

In chapter 4, the chapter on the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity, I argued that a combination of neo-liberal economic policy and the intervention of “Western” NGOs had “dis-embedded” (Giddens, 1991) heritage and memory from particular heritage sites in Albania. I also argued that this has prevented the “democratisation of memory” at the locales where it has occurred as the opportunity to represent and (re)construct myth and memory at these particular sites has been “lifted out” (Giddens, 1991: 21) from local, regional or national control. In chapter 5, however, I pointed out that funding from a “Western” NGO had allowed the representation of “counter-memories” of state-socialism (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015) at the Gjirokastër Museum at a time when central government was only willing to fund negative “anti-communist” representations of the state-socialist past. As the Gjirokastër Museum represents memories of everyday life in the state-socialist era as described by local people I suggested that this can be considered a kind of “re-embedding” of memory. An openness to global flows *can* result in “dis-embedding” and a “lifting out” of democratic control (Giddens, 1991: 21), but it can also liberate individuals and communities from reliance on central government. The relationship between globalisation and the “democratisation of memory”, indeed between globalisation and democratisation more generally, is a complex one.

Having recapped the key findings of my analysis chapters I will now relate my findings to those studies of the “democratisation of memory”, or of similar and parallel processes, in other parts of CEE which I discussed in the literature review. Verdery (1996:15) suggests that processes of change occurring in post-socialist CEE should be considered “transformation” rather than a “transition” to “Western” norms. The various studies of the occurrence and nature “democratisation of memory” in post-socialist CEE which I have discussed in section 2.4 of the literature review support Verdery’s (1996) notion that the post-socialist countries

of CEE are undergoing transformation, but not transition to “Western” norms. The literature discussed in section 2.4 of the literature review reveals two key patterns of change which relate to the “democratisation of memory”; a trend toward the representation and (re)construction of populist-nationalist narratives at state-owned “official” museums and heritage sites and; the emergence of, as Light and Young (2015: 221) put it “two seemingly contradictory trends ... the “official” rejection of the state-socialist era, and the existence of more nuanced and sometimes nostalgic “counter-memory” of that same past”. I will relate each of these broader regional trends to my own findings in turn.

In section 2.4 of the literature review I discussed accounts of post-socialist era changes in museum practice in Hungary, Estonia and Poland which related to processes of the “democratisation of memory” in those countries. In each of these national contexts there has occurred a shift toward an illiberal kind of populist-nationalism and this has shaped the nature and content of representations of the nation in “official” state-funded museums. While there are significant numbers of people who object to the discourse of populist-nationalism in each of these countries there are also significant numbers of people who welcome the representation and (re)construction of populist narratives of the nation. Where a majority of the population supports the representation and (re)production of populist-nationalist discourse at “official” museums and heritage sites, and where museums and heritage sites provide “the people” with what they want, this has to be considered the “democratisation of memory”, but it is very different to that process described and applauded by Atkinson (2008). This same pattern is evident in Albania. State-funded heritage sites and museums are representing and (re)constructing popular myths of the nation; both the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the myth of Skanderbeg are reproduced in their popular form. In Albania, as elsewhere in CEE, the “democratisation of memory” is in many instances taking a different, form to that described by Atkinson (2008). The “democratisation of memory” can create an environment in which popular narratives and myths are reproduced rather than challenged or undermined. There is, however, one aspect of “official” discourse which has been contested widely in post-socialist CEE. This brings me to the second regional trend; the contestation of “official” representations of state-socialism and the representation of “counter-memories” of state-socialism (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015).

As Light and Young (2015) observe, “official” anti-communist discourse is in evidence at a number of “official” museums and heritage sites across CEE. But there is also widespread evidence of “counter-memories” of state-socialism which is nostalgic or more nuanced and ambivalent (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015). This can take the form of what Robertson (2016) calls “heritage form below”, the representation of everyday aspects of state-socialism at “un-official” heritage sites and museums as observed by, for example, Berdahl (2010) and Petrovic (2013). In chapter 6 I discussed the construction of negative “official” representations of state-socialism at “official” state-funded museums as well as the construction of more nuanced and ambivalent representations of state-socialism at “unofficial” museums in the context of post-socialist Albania. Here again it is apparent that the processes occurring in Albania are part of a broader pattern of processes occurring across much of CEE. The representation of “counter-memories” of state-socialism (Legg, 2005, Light and Young, 2015) is an aspect of the “democratisation of memory” in the context of CEE which resembles that process described by Atkinson (2008). It is the challenging and undermining of “official” discourse and the “emergence of plural voices” (Atkinson, 2008: 383).

In sections 2.2 and 2.4 of the literature review I discussed liberal and illiberal forms of democracy and suggested that liberal and illiberal forms of the “democratisation of memory” can be observed in different contexts. An illiberal “democratisation of memory” is one which allows and/or encourages the representation of popular myths and memories and at the same time suppresses the voices of minorities and subaltern groups. The literature discussed in section 2.4 of the literature review seems to indicate that this kind of illiberal “democratisation of memory” may be occurring in much of CEE, and in the contexts of Hungary and Poland in particular. My research in Albania indicates that current trends are rather more mixed and ambiguous. The representations of the myth of Illyrian-Albanian continuity and the myth of Skanderbeg analysed and discussed are certainly populist in nature, but this is not in itself illiberal. The only evidence of an organised and “official” illiberal approach to the representation of memory - that is the only evidence of the suppression of “unofficial” representations of memory by the state – which I observed in Albania was the illiberal approach of the Democratic Party to certain “unofficial” representations of state-socialism. Since the defeat of the Democratic Party in the 2013 general election the Albanian government has taken a more nuanced and less dogmatic approach to the state-socialist past.

While populist representations of national history and heritage can be observed at “official” state-funded museums and heritage sites in Albania the state does not appear to be shifting toward a more illiberal kind of democracy or a more illiberal kind of “democratisation of memory”. Rather the current trend in Albania – in contrast to other parts of the world - is one of gradual liberalisation.

Having recapped and compared the key findings of my analysis chapters, and having related these findings to studies carried out elsewhere in CEE, I will now discuss the key theoretical findings and contributions to theory of my thesis. I will explain how my thesis contributes to the critical evaluation of the concept of the “democratisation of memory” and how it expands upon current understanding of the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity. Firstly, then, to the critical evaluation of the concept of the “democratisation of memory”.

Atkinson’s (2008) description of the “democratisation of memory” is a description of that process as it has occurred in one particular context; that of the UK. In that particular context the “democratisation of memory”, as described by Atkinson (2008: 381) involves a shift “from the great stories of traditional historiography”. It involves “the emergence of plural voices that complicate, expand upon, dispute or undermine traditional, “official” narratives of history” (Atkinson, 2008: 383). When the “democratisation of memory” occurs, Atkinson (2008: 385) writes, “rather than one heritage we get a series of socially constructed interpretations of the past that serve different ends”. The main key point of this thesis is that the “democratisation of memory” does not necessarily occur in this way and does not necessarily produce this result. In different contexts, and in relation to different narratives, myths and memories, different types or patterns of the “democratisation of memory” can occur. In Albania, as elsewhere in post-socialist CEE, the “democratisation of memory” has resulted not in a shift “from the great stories of traditional historiography” (Atkinson, 2008: 381) but in the valorisation, the (re)construction and the re-embedding of some of those “great stories”. It has not always brought the “emergence of plural voices” which challenge and undermine “traditional” and “official” narratives of history” (Atkinson, 2008: 383). Rather, “traditional” and “official” narratives of history” (ibid) can remain popular and meaningful amidst the “democratisation of memory”. This does not mean that the “democratisation of memory” has not occurred in the context of Albania or of CEE more

broadly. The “democratisation of memory” of state-socialism which has occurred in Albania and elsewhere in CEE provides evidence that the process can occur and has occurred in these contexts. What it shows is that the “democratisation of memory” can occur in different ways and can produce different results, that there are different kinds or patterns of the “democratisation of memory”.

My conclusion to the critical evaluation of the term and concept of the “democratisation of memory” is this. As a term and concept it is useful as it describes a process which can be observed and analysed in a variety of contexts throughout the world. But it is important to recognise that the process described by Atkinson (2008) is just one manifestation of the “democratisation of memory” and that different types or patterns of the “democratisation of memory” can occur in different contexts and in relation to different narratives, myths and memories. Indeed Palmer’s (1999) work on heritage tourism, identity and memory in the context of the UK (which predates Atkinson’s (2008) writings on the “democratisation of memory”) suggests that the kind of populist-nationalist representation of history and heritage apparent in Albania and elsewhere in CEE can also be found in the UK. Even in the UK, different types or patterns of the “democratisation of memory” to that described by Atkinson (2008) may be in evidence. It is becoming increasingly clear that populist-nationalism can and does occur in “the West”. And that brings me to the second key theoretical point of this thesis; that relating to the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity.

In section 2.2 I discussed a “spectrum” of opinions on the future of nations and national identities and related these to the occurrence of the “democratisation of memory”. I noted that some, such as Macdonald (2003), Ames (2004) and Smith (2006) consider the “democratisation of memory” (or, at least, similar or parallel processes) to have the potential to, or even to be likely to, result in the fragmentation of national “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) into smaller communities of shared memory. Though he does not specifically mention nations and national identities, the process of “democratisation of memory” described by Atkinson (2008: 385) is one which seems likely to have this effect as it allows the emergence of a “polyphony of voices” and of “a series of socially constructed interpretations of the past that serve different ends”. I also noted that others, such as Samuel (1994) and Confino (1997) considered the process likely to strengthen national identities and

to make them more inclusive by providing a proliferation of “common denominators” (Confino, 1997: 1399) and “points of access” (Samuel, 1994:160) through which individuals can connect with, and become incorporated into, the national “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983). And I noted Palmer’s (1999) observation that the commodification of heritage and memory - an important facet of the “democratisation of memory” – can lead to the continued representation and (re)construction of popular traditional narratives and myths of the nation at heritage sites. There is, clearly, a lack of consensus on the relationship between the “democratisation of memory” and the (re)construction of national identity.

While I do not deny that the “democratisation of memory” has the potential to undermine or fragment a shared sense of national identity I have argued that throughout this thesis that it also has the potential to do quite the opposite. The “democratisation of memory” can generate a proliferation of signs, symbols and representations of popular narratives, myths and memories of the nation, it can generate new ways to consume and connect to those popular myths, and all these can add to the “matrix of images, ideas, spaces, things, discourses and practices” (Edensor, 2002: 17) which bind national “imagined communities” together. This, then, is the second key theoretical contribution of my thesis. The “democratisation of memory” can, in particular contexts, reproduce and strengthen nations and national identities.

In order to maintain a focused narrative, and for the sake of brevity, some important theoretical and analytical perspectives have been omitted from my analysis. The most major omission has been that of a consideration of the gender politics of national identity and national heritage. The existence of what Aitchison (1999, 59) terms “gendered representations of heritage”, as well as the way in which this shapes perceptions of the nation and national identity has been recognised for some time. For example Edensor and Kothari (1993) have observed the (re)construction of masculinised notions of place and Scottish national identity at heritage sites in Stirling. More recently, important research has revealed interrelationship of gender politics and the “new wave” of populist nationalism in CEE, and particularly in Poland. Korolczusuk and Graff (2018:2) identify contemporary Polish populist nationalism as an “ideological construct that effectively combines a critique of liberal value systems (individualism, human rights and gender equality) with opposition towards contemporary global capitalism”. According to Korolczusuk and Graff (2018) illiberal populist-

nationalist parties and organisations position themselves against supranational organisations such as the United Nations and European Union and against “Western” liberal elites as defenders of traditional, authentic national values, including values relating to gender roles and sexuality. They have, Korolczusuk and Graff (2018) observe, represented neo-liberal economic policies, the promotion of equal rights and the promotion of LGBT rights as being facets of a singular ideological project of the so called “liberal elite”. Binnie (2014:251), too, examines this relationship between social conservatism, the rejection of neo-liberal economic policies and populist nationalism in Poland, and argues that “the social and economic dislocation and anger associated with neoliberal restructuring” has contributed to the populist-nationalist turn. Both Binnie (2014) and Graff (2010) observe the way in which cultural differences between “Western liberal elites” and “ordinary Polish people” regarding gender politics have been politicised within Poland. Binnie (2014: 251) points out that “Feminist and LGBTQ political concerns have often been represented as a foreign or EU imposition within nationalist populist rhetoric” while Graff (2010:584) observes that cultural differences regarding gender politics have become a “boundary marker” between Poland and the EU and “a reference point for political self-definition and national pride”. Thus attitudes and values regarding gender and sexuality have come to be represented and/or understood, by some at least, as defining national characteristics of Polish identity. While the relationship between gender politics and national identity has received marked academic attention in Poland, and some attention elsewhere in CEE – for example Bracewell (1996) has explored to relationship between gender politics and national identity in Serbia - it is an area which has received little academic scrutiny in the context of Albania (though see Xhaho (2015) for an investigation of homophobic rhetoric in narratives of Albanian identity). The gender politics of Albanian national identity is, therefore, an area where further research is required.

I will finish this section with a discussion of some ways in which this research might be taken further. Firstly, the concept of liberal/illiberal democratisation of memory might be considered and explored further in contexts out-with post-socialist era Albania, in CEE and beyond. While the notion of the “democratisation of memory” as observed and described by Atkinson (2008) in the context of the UK is what I would describe as a particularly liberal kind of “democratisation of memory” it may be that more illiberal kinds of “democratisation of memory” are occurring in the UK in parallel with the processes described by Atkinson (ibid).



This is suggested by Palmer's (1999) UK based research, but more exploration of the extent to which populist and/or illiberal representations of the past, of place and/or of national identity have persisted or proliferated in Atkinson's (2008) era of the democratisation of memory is required. Other areas related to this research project and requiring further research include the representation of the Albanian minority in Macedonia and the representation of the Serb minority in Kosovo - or lack thereof. Representations of Macedonia's ancient heritage within Macedonia also offer a potentially fruitful area for research due to the political/geopolitical significance of notions of Illyrian/Hellenic/Macedonian heritage in that contested part of Europe. A comparative analysis of representations of ancient heritage in northern Greece, Southern Albania and Macedonia and the geopolitical significance of those representations would be a more ambitious but potentially rewarding area for further research.

## 8.0. References

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